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MODERN HANDBOOKS OF RELIGION.

MAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

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To my Sons,

GEORGE GILBERT,

CHARLES WICKSTEED,

RICHARD HAROLD,

AND

FRANCIS EDWIN,

I Dedicate this Little Book.

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PREFACE.

Throughout the following pages I have kept in mind young persons of very moderate culture and unaccustomed to any technical phraseology. I have striven hard to be simple, and I believe that in the main part of what I have written I have succeeded in that aim. But in chapters VI. and VII. I fear that I may have failed. I should like to say, therefore, at the outset, that the book may very well be read without those chapters. Indeed, they are addressed to such as have already been disturbed by the doubts of religion which so widely prevail; and those who have known no such disturbance may properly pass them over.

In writing of Man's Knowledge of God I have not attempted to demonstrate God's existence. My aim has been more modest. I have only tried to state the grounds which as faithful a scrutiny as I can make reveal to me as those on which my own theism practically rests. I am well aware of many arguments which may be adduced against this and that position which I have taken up. I know, too, that the counter-argument is not in every case an easy one. Yet most of these adverse contentions I have not even mentioned. I am not a champion challenging the world. I am simply an individual believer in God, hoping to help a few others by as clear a presentation as I can make of my own consciousness and as true a record as I can give of my own experience.

If I have passed over adverse arguments, I have also left out a number of confirmatory ones. I have done so because, whatever value may attach to them,

as a matter of fact they have not laid hold of my own mind, and my theism in no way rests on them. I do not deny their validity, but I have been engaged in examining my own consciousness, and I have not found them playing any active part there.

To give an illustration. I have dwelt much on the necessity of the mind to posit a living Cause behind all movement. I do not doubt philosophically that a living Cause is required just as much behind all rest. But I do not find that, when an object at rest catches my eye, I immediately think of the Will behind it, whereas I do find that my mind intuitively acts in that manner when I see an object in motion.

I have striven rather to state the facts of my own consciousness than to reason in an abstract manner. I should be sorry to cast any disrespect on metaphysical reasonings concerning the existence of God or the modes of his energy. Yet such disquisitions, I fear, often start as many doubts as they allay. If communion with God is a fact to a man, he needs metaphysics to prove God to him just as much and just as little as he needs metaphysics to prove to him the existence of his friend. Thus he may, with the most modern men, pass wholly out of the metaphysical into the positive method, and yet—nay, all the more—stand firm in his theism as the rocks in the foundations of the earth.

Many books on theism have been written, good and bad, large and small. This is but one more. I cannot tell whether what I have written may help, in any measure, to clear away difficulties or brighten faith in any mind. But this at least I may do, and know that I shall help men. I can tell them of two or three books, but little bigger than this, which I know they will be the wiser men for reading. I will pick out Mr. Brownlow Maitland's *Theism or Agnosticism*, Theodore Parker's *Discourse of Religion*, Mr. Savage's *Belief in God*, and Mr. Fiske's *Man's Destiny*. My keenest pleasure in having finished my own little work

is that I may now cut open another volume by this last strong thinker and most lucid writer, which has already stood some weeks upon my shelves. I dared not read it sooner, because I knew that I should want to lay aside my own pen altogether or else to transcribe sentence after sentence from *The Idea of God.*

I have only to say further that although, at page 82, I have spoken of the separateness of the spiritual and the physical spheres in their causation and their phenomena, that passage is intended without prejudice to the profound question of philosophy which seeks to know the ultimate causal energies, if any, which pass over from either of these spheres to the other.

LIVERPOOL, R. A. A.
January 19th, 1886.

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MAN'S KNOWLEDGE OF GOD.

—o—

CHAPTER I.

INTRODUCTORY.

If you watch from day to day a child in early babyhood, you will discover that, so far from being idle, it is busy throughout its waking hours in the great task which no man on earth has ever done with—the task of learning. It is said that a child learns more in the first twelve months of its life than in all the years that follow to three score years and ten. I do not know about its learning *more;* but certainly it learns in that first year the foundation knowledge without which it could never acquire any other knowledge whatever. For it learns the great fundamental two-fold fact that there is a Self and that there is a Not-self.

Yes, that is the beginning of all human knowledge, without which all instructions would

be hopeless, without which there could be no industry, no language, no literature, no art, no science, no civilisation, no religion; and that the baby acquires in the very beginnings of its life. Those quick motions of hand and foot, that glancing of the eye, that clumsy dabbing of the little fist here and there, and by and by that more skilful carrying of the ball and the ring and the orange and every other object to the mouth,—this is not all vain, nor even mere exercise of limb and muscle. It is a rigid course of scientific experiment, all leading up to the grand climax of the discovery and the proof that there is Self and there is Not-self.

I do not mean of course that an infant says to itself that there is a Self and there is a Not-self, or even knows that it has acquired a wonderful piece of knowledge. But as a matter of fact it knows, and acts on the knowledge ever after, that itself has certain powers and feelings,—powers which it can exercise on balls and dolls and chairs and tables and brothers and sisters; feelings which are in their turn acted upon by those same toys and pieces of furniture and people. It knows that if its leg is pinched, an experience comes to it which does not come if the table's leg

is pinched. It knows that there is a pleasure when milk is put into its own mouth which there is not when milk is only put into a basin on the table. It knows that the moment it wishes to do so it can move its arm, but that mere wishing will not move a chair. And so this distinguishing between what is itself and what is not itself makes the very basis of all its reasoning and all its conduct for evermore.

> The baby new to earth and sky,
> What time his tender palm is prest
> Against the circle of the breast,
> Has never thought that "this is I:"
>
> But as he grows he gathers much,
> And learns the use of "I" and "me,"
> And finds "I am not what I see,
> And other than the things I touch."
>
> So rounds he to a separate mind
> From whence clear memory may begin,
> As thro' the frame that binds him in
> His isolation grows defined.

Philosophers call this Self in each of us the Ego, while they call all else—the rest of the human race, the world, the heavens—the Non-ego;—"ego" being both Latin and Greek for "I." The Ego to me is different from the Ego to you, and the Ego to you is different from the Ego to anyone else. The Non-ego

to me is chiefly the same as to other people, but partly different. So, also, to you and to every one else.

Now, it is clear that each of us knows the Ego, the Self, in a much more intimate way than he knows the Non-ego, the Not-self. For he knows the Ego *immediately*, not through any medium, but directly; while the Non-ego he has to find out by observation or reasoning. I can never doubt that *I am;* but I may doubt whether what I see or hear may not really be some illusion or deception. So no one doubts his own existence; but some men have professed to doubt whether the outward world is not all a dream.

When the child grows older, he will become conscious that his division of objects into Self and Not-self is not the whole of the matter. In that which he has been accustomed to think of as the Self he will perceive a great and mysterious division. It is two-fold, having both an inward and an outward element. The outward part is plain enough. It is made up of head and trunk, arms and legs, and may be spoken of generally as "the body." It can be seen and handled. But behind or within this manifest outward self, there is an inward self, which no eye can see, no

hand can handle. Movement belongs to the outward self; and through its movement it accomplishes many things. Thought, feeling, willing, belong to the inward self; and the finest movements of the body are all in obedience to these unseen motions of the inward self. Clever men, in many lands and ages, have tried hard to show that this inward self is not really distinct from the outward,—that it is a subtle function of the blood or of the brain; but they have never succeeded in persuading any but a few. Always the inward feeling of their hearers or their readers has constrained them still to say, "No, this inward self is something other than limb, or blood, or brain, or protoplasm, or any movement thereof;"—and they have sought various names for this mysterious inward Ego,—the Mind, the Spirit, the Soul. We will speak of it as the Soul.

A man consists, then, of Body and Soul, the outward and the inward, the seen and the unseen. One of the profoundest problems of philosophy is the question how these two are connected together. They certainly are connected most closely and intimately; but, never yet has philosophy even begun to find the first rudiments of an answer to the question,

"How?" Science has given us no hint or inkling. It is, so far, absolute, insoluble mystery. It seems as though in its very nature it must be so for ever.

What science has done is to show how marvellously close and minute the connection is. We are able to demonstrate that every wish, every thought, every feeling of the inward self is immediately registered by some change in the wonderfully organised matter which forms the brain. We are able to show that the slightest touch upon the surface of the body acts upon the sensory nerve which carries the communication up to the brain, and that then somehow or other the Mind becomes conscious of pleasure or of pain. We are able to exhibit the immediate command of the will over the motor nerves, which, in turn, set in motion the muscles of hand or foot, of neck or tongue or eye. But *how* the effect passes from Soul to Body, from Body to Soul, we are not even able to conceive. The bridge is passed in either direction a hundred thousand times a day: what the bridge is, the thought of man can in no wise figure to itself.

But, if there is this mysterious chasm between Body and Soul—a chasm bridged by a bridge

as mysterious as itself—there are nevertheless curious and suggestive analogies between the two. The most interesting of these analogies lies in the power of growth which belongs to both. The body of the baby steadily grows with the years through infancy and childhood and youth,—grows not only in size and strength, but also in variety and delicacy of function. The movements which a well-trained young man can make seem a perfect infinity compared to a baby's. Not only can he walk and run and leap and swim. By nicely adjusted movements of arm and hand he may become an accomplished batsman or bowler, a fine billiard or tennis player, a skilled executant on the piano or the violin. By exquisitely subtle motions of the fingers he may learn to write a bold and graceful hand or to paint a masterly picture. By still more refined and delicate motions of the muscles of the throat and tongue he may come to be a noble singer. In all this there is constant growth in bodily capacity. But by and by the body grows no more, acquires no new arts, loses by degrees the arts it has, is enfeebled and decays.

And the inward element in men grows likewise. The baby soul is small and weak.

The range of its ideas is very narrow; the scope of its feeling is limited; the force of its will is slight. But as the years roll on, not only does the inward self grow strong; it increases marvellously too in the variety and delicacy of its functions. This is clearest in the range of its thought and reason; all the world of human knowledge—history, literature, science, philosophy—comes within its scope. Distinctions which the child could not possibly understand are to the man clear as noon-day. Arguments more and more elaborate become easy to the strengthening understanding. But not only that; the feelings too gain a new depth and strength. Sweet and pure as are the affections of a little child, lovely as is the religion of childhood, the depth of a strong man's love and the sublime fervour of his piety far surpass anything that is possible to a child; and while children love parents and companions, good men and women love the millions of their unknown countrymen and brethren of other races. Again, the power of will waxes in a well-trained soul year after year, till manhood is capable of a strength and constancy of purpose altogether unlike the the short-lived resolutions which characterise the childish will.

But there is one momentous difference between the growing of the body and the growing of the soul. The body always leaves off growing after a few years, and presently it is enfeebled and decays. But very often the souls of our friends continue to grow and grow as long as we have any knowledge of them. All the mental and spiritual faculties expand and strengthen up to fifty years of age, to sixty, to seventy, to eighty. There seems no reason why that wonderful growth should ever cease. The only impediment seems to be the body with its dimming avenues of sense and lessening capacity for effort and expression. And the natural thought that comes to us when at last our friend's heart stops beating and the breath no longer heaves the bosom, is that now surely the soul is free at last for unhindered growth in some new life which is hidden from our gaze.

So far I have spoken systematically of an outward Self and an inward Self, Body and Soul. But we cannot help feeling that we are really each one of us one Self only; and we cannot help asking which is the true, fundamental Self, the inward or the outward, the Body or the Soul. And as soon as the question is faced, the answer comes clearly and

unmistakably to us. The real Self is the inward one, this unseen Soul that thinks and feels and wills. Every-day language shows that this fact is part of the common consciousness, that we all naturally feel and know that our true Self is Soul, not Body. For if a man's thinking power or willing power is weakened and some part of it is, as it were, cut off from him, we say "He is not *himself*." But no one ever says that a man is "not himself" because his arm or his leg is cut off. When we talk of the body getting better, we simply say that the man has recovered; when we talk of the soul getting better, we say that he has recovered *himself*. When we say that a man has "forgotten himself," the conception is not of one who does not remember his own face or form, but of one who seems to have broken the natural continuity of his mental and moral life. An "absent" man is not always one whose body is far away, but may be one whose thoughts and emotions are playing about the things which are not physically present.

No man really doubts—however he may be entangled by philosophical speculations—that he himself is that which thinks and wills and feels,—what I have called the inward Self. And one of the greatest of philosophers built

up the whole of his philosophy on the little sentence, the beginning of all knowledge and of all wisdom, the most elementary piece of reasoning he could conceive, "I *think;* THEREFORE, I *am.*"

What a host of strange and searching questions spring to our lips when once we have faced and realised this fundamental truth, that each one of us is a living Soul, unseen, unheard, but there somehow, the very innermost reality, behind the busy hands and the speaking mouth and those mysterious windows of the Soul, the eyes! What is the relation of this Self, this Soul, to the body? What is its relation to all the outward world? Whence came it? Whither goes it? How may it be trained? Is there aught greater than it, behind it, above it, embracing it in mysterious and awful sovereignty?

One thing we can say at the very outset about the relation between the Soul and the Body. The man *is* the Soul; he *has* the Body. The Body is the tool, the instrument, the garment, the possession of the man; the Soul is the man himself.

William Henry Furness has expressed in a beautiful hymn that great question and the answering knowledge which have formed the

substance of this chapter.

What is this that stirs within,
Loving goodness, hating sin,
Always craving to be blest,
Finding here below no rest?

What is it? and whither, whence,
This unsleeping, secret sense,
Longing for its rest and food
In some hidden, untried good?

'Tis the Soul,—mysterious name;
Him it seeks from whom it came:
While I muse, I feel the fire
Burning on, and mounting higher.

CHAPTER II.

THE WITNESS OF THE UNDERSTANDING.

At an early stage of our experience—a stage so far back in our infancy that we cannot now recall it—we learn to regard the larger part of the Not-self, of that which *we are not*, as being not alive, having no power like our own either of thinking, willing and feeling, or of beginning to move without some force outside it moving it. At the very first, indeed, a little child is apt to think everything alive. If he strikes his head against the table, he fancies that the table, as a living thing, gave or feels the blow; and foolish mothers and nurses encourage the superstition by telling the child that it is a "naughty table." But very soon not only tables and chairs, but sticks and stones, rocks and hills, the wide sea and the high mountains, the great sun and the beautiful stars, are recognised as being without the wonderful gift of life, as what we call inanimate objects. Now, if these things are not themselves alive, we want to

know whether there is or is not any unseen living Power that guides and governs them.

We observed how early the baby becomes aware that it exercises power over its own arms and legs. The child finds too that he has power over the smaller objects around him. Presently this power extends to the arrangement in some definite order of a number of small objects,—such, for example, as wooden bricks, which he arranges into towers or railways or churches; that is, he has power to make *structures*, to *construct*.

And as the child becomes a man he acquires more and more of this power of construction. One man takes to one department, another to another; but among them men learn to construct all those varied objects great and small, useful and ornamental, enduring or evanescent, which are the products of human labour.

If you reflect, you will perceive that all productive industry, not the engineer's alone, but the artisan's, the bricklayer's, the gardener's, even the tailor's and the confectioner's, consists entirely in exercising this power over outward objects. It consists in moving things, rearranging them, and that is all. Even writing and painting are but the like activity. So far as they are physical acts, as distinguished from

mental, they consist entirely in moving ink and pigments from one place to another. The whole of our outward life consists in the causing of movements in objects. The objects may be the fragments of a quarried rock, the clay spread under our feet, the types of the printer, the sugar and currants bought at the grocer's, the particles of air which we drive through the organ-tube, the balls on a billiard-table, the atoms that make up a cigar, or simply our own hands and feet. But all physical activity is the movement of physical objects. In that perpetual process there are three terms: the Self, the soul, the will, is the commandant; the parts of the human body are the instruments or tools; the third term is the object moved.

But now so inveterately accustomed are we to this process—so infinitely varied in its detail, so absolutely uniform in its essence—that our minds indissolubly associate *all* movement with some energising will. So constant is our experience of the power of inward will to create outward movement, that we link inward will and outward movement together in an indissoluble bond of thought. From the observation of a movement the mind springs instantaneously to the inference of a living power, akin to ourselves, as the cause of that movement.

Is it not so? Suppose that as you sit in your office or your class-room, of a sudden a stone crashes through the window. You infer at once with absolute certainty that some one or other threw that stone. The alternative, that the stone jumped up and broke the window of its own accord, does not even occur to you. If any one suggested it, you would exclaim, "Why, the stone is not alive!" No, you demand something living, some Self, some will as the cause of what has happened,—and you almost see the heels of the mischievous boy disappearing round the corner of the street.

Nor is it possible to the human mind to conceive of any motion of outward things otherwise than as caused in the last resort by some living will. It does not, indeed, always appear that that will is the *immediate* cause of the motion that we see; sometimes there are several links between. For instance, you see a machine taking in sheets of paper at one end, and turning them out at the other cut and folded and pasted into neat tradesmen's bags. If you showed that to a Hottentot or a Fiji-islander, he would most certainly think that the living will was in the machine itself with its great jerking iron limbs. You know better; but you are compelled just as much as the savage

himself to take for granted a living will at the beginning of it all; and you think of the man who made the machine or the one who set it going.

And so when letters come to you through the post, when your dinner is served up to you, when the strains of the street-organ penetrate to the room where you are trying to write, when the cricket-ball comes flying over the high fence on to the road where you are passing, when the arrow whizzes through the air, when in the dead darkness of the night the shrill shriek of the express makes you start from your slumber, your mind inevitably associates these things one and all with the unseen human wills which have wrought them and without which they never could have been.

But after all, the vast majority of the movements in the midst of which we live and move and have our being can be referred to no human wills whatever. As I sit writing, I hear the tramp of little feet on the pavement below, a little bird flits across my window, the trees in my neighbour's garden are moving their heads gently to and fro, the light clouds sail across the bright spring sky, and all is glorified by the light that comes streaming down from the great sun to flood the whole. Of all these

movements I can refer the tramp of the little feet only to human wills. The little bird, I think, has a will of its own—a dim, circumscribed will perhaps, but still something akin to what I call will in me. But the swaying trees and the clouds and the wonderful light dashing across the vast void at a speed quite unthinkable,—no, neither bird's nor man's is the will by which these motions are.

And indeed, if in the light of modern science, we look out upon the great cosmos in which we live, imagination is quickly overwhelmed by the marvel and the multitude of all the perpetual movements round about us. We talk of the immovable rocks. But all the rocks that gird the ocean, together with this solid earth on which we stand, spring forward nineteen miles each second upon their ordered path around the sun.

Few of us realise the infinite variety of movement all around us. Suppose it is a still and sultry day. Not a breath of air is stirring, so you say. The very cattle lie weary in the shade, and the leaves of the trees hang down unswayed, and the only sound is the lazy murmur of the slothful brook. You say that nature is asleep and all energy is hushed.

But if you had eyes that could penetrate

through stem and stone, and ears that could hear what stir there is in the things on which you gaze, how wonderful would be the revelation to you of the energies that are awake and forceful all about you! See the trees that hang their listless leaves: why, the sap is rushing up within the bark, a perpetual stream of strength and life, pouring its juices into every fibre, emptying a million vesicles into every silent leaf, while in every cell the fluid leaps and dances madly to and fro, filling the region all around with life. Every blade of grass beneath your feet is thrilling with the currents that speed along its mazes. The green field bears multitudinous life, and under the soil burrow myriads of busy worms. Still! why, the very light that dazzles your weary eyes is hurled in dashing billows from the sun nearly two hundred thousand miles a second, and this busy earth is sorting these waves as fast as they come clashing down upon its face, absorbing these and casting those back, green and grey and brown, into the dancing air. And as for that great sun that looks one still ball of liquid light, out of the great whirlpools of blazing metal leap the terrific fires all around its giant globe, and one tongue of those titan flames would lick up this little earth as a snake licks

up a fly. Then, as for sounds, could you hear the movements of the atoms all round about you, it would be as the din of a multitude rushing to battle. Within every fragment of stone or bit of clay that you hold in your hand or spurn with your foot, there is probably an incessant vibration of molecules so minute that no microscope can detect them and so rapid that imagination cannot picture it. The gas in the air which we breathe is made up of molecules—estimated by some at 19,000,000,000,000,000,000 in one cubic centimetre—which are incessantly dashing to and fro in all possible directions at something like twenty miles a minute. On the nail of your little finger there are many millions of blows dealt every second by these flying particles.

Now, if for a moment we even partially realise this extraordinary activity in every place and time, is it possible for us to help supposing some sleepless will-power behind it all? Does not the very constitution of our minds compel us to attribute it all to some living force working its mighty energy through all the structure of the worlds?

If we are not perpetually impressed in spite of ourselves with the sense of such a living power in the universe, it is, I think, because

many of the visible movements are comparatively slow. If you look at the clock, neither the hour-hand nor the minute-hand moves fast enough to bring up instantaneously to your mind the thought of the force that moves it, although you know perfectly well that it is moving all the time. But in a certain public room which I often visit there is a second-hand longer than the minute-hand and passing over the whole broad face of the dial. The first time that caught my eye, its rapid motion instantaneously suggested to me that it was some live thing; and to this day I can never look at it, but it calls up in my mind immediately the idea of the force that drives it. Yet the minute-hand only moving at one-sixtieth of the pace, and the hour-hand at one sixtieth again of that, do not make me think of the force that drives them once in a hundred times that I look at them.

Just so, we may watch the crocuses growing so very slowly through the February days, and still more the young trees that add but a single inch to their girth all the long year through, and have no sense borne in on us of the hidden force that compels that growth. But if now you could drop the acorn on the plain and in an hour see the green shoot peep out

from the soil, and the sapling spring to its slender height, and the youthful stem thicken and solidify, and the great branches stretch out their vast limbs, and the green leaves form and fade and fall, and form and fade and fall again a hundred times, and the huge knots stand out upon the trunk, and fresh acorns by the thousand fall from the parent tree and build up the forest spreading far and wide;—if you could see all that happen in an *hour*, you could not possibly resist the sense of an unseen, living power energising through the whole. Yet the difference between an hour and a thousand years makes no real difference in the nature of the force required; and if you would need a will as cause of it all in one case, you need it in the other case no less.

In the old days of the world's childhood, men all felt the need of explaining the most striking natural movements that they beheld as wrought by some will-power working through the objects which they saw. When the avalanche fell thundering to the plain, they thought that some god was sporting on the mountain and had rolled it down. When the lightning flashed across the sky, they thought that some god was hurling his thunder-bolts against his enemies. We in our day are not living in the

childhood of the world; and we have learnt the scientific explanation of these striking phenomena. We know that the avalanche falls because the warm spring sun has melted the snow that bound that mass to the summit of the cliff, and so there is no restraining bond to resist the force of gravitation upon the accumulation hanging over the brow of the steep. We know that the lightning flashes because the electric fluid leaps from cloud to cloud when its proper balance has been disturbed. But after all, that statement of the law explains nothing and leaves us still in search of the actual power that wrought the change.

We say that the apple falls to the ground because the earth attracts it. But we do not really believe that the earth *pulls* the apple. We say that the tide swings from side to side of the ocean because the shifting moon attracts the waters. But we do not really believe that the moon, away there nearly a quarter of a million of miles, *pulls* the sea. Or so far as we do, so far, that is, as we think of the attraction of gravity as an actual pulling, we are fancying the earth and the moon as living things pulling as living children pull when they play at "oranges and lemons." If we sternly drill our minds to put away this idea

of living, conscious pulling from our conception of attraction, then we are compelled to think of some other force, some living power which actually moves the apple or the ocean under the guise of this attraction which we call gravitation.

Just so, again, when you contemplate the magnet and the little block of iron sliding along the table to meet it, if you analyse your thought, you will find you must either think of the block of iron as alive and moving *itself*, or think of the magnet as pulling the block of iron, or think of some will-power like the power you wield when you lift a stone, which is making that movement which you see.

And so it is that always we come back, by the very constitution of our minds, to the thought of will as the cause—the only cause conceivable—of the infinite motions of the universe from the sweep of a sun through space to the dance of the molecules in a drop of water.

Will, the universal cause: is that will one or many?

In our experiences of the effects produced by human will, we judge whether any particular group of effects issues from one will or several by observing whether there is a regular order

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and interrelation among them, or whether they seem to turn up anyhow and without regard to one another. For instance, in a battle, if the foe comes on in wild disorder, breaking recklessly upon the British square, each man fighting for his own hand, spear and sword, pistol and rifle indiscriminately brandished, we know that there is no controlling will or purpose over the whole, but a multitude of wills acting irrespectively of one another. On the other hand, if the centre and the wings of the advancing host move forward with uniform precision, if at a given distance from the British square every rifle is levelled and the sharp peal strikes the air at a single moment, if at that same moment an ambush on our flank is suddenly revealed and the roar of the great guns from the fort a couple of miles away breaks upon our ears, then we know that one mind has planned the attack, and all these ten thousand move not by the caprice of their own multitudinous wills and judgments, but by the will and judgment of the man on horseback far away there on yonder hillock, whose form you can just descry motionless against the sky.

Harmony of motion always suggests unity of propelling will. A regiment on the march

is said to move "as one man." And it is so indeed; simply because all those pairs of legs are at the command for the time being, not of their several owners, but of the colonel riding outside the ranks.

Or take some machine of complex structure. In our manufacturing industries there is no machine more complicated, yet more precise, I suppose, than the machines employed to make Nottingham lace. Now, if when all those bars and wires and levers and wheels and bands begin to move they banged promiscuously into one another and nothing came of it all but blows and noise, there would be no guessing whether it had been designed by one mind or by many. But as it is, though the parts of this machine are so many and so minute that I have heard a man say he only began to understand it when he had *lived with it* for twelve years, yet these work in such exquisite harmony that slowly, as you watch, the threads hung up at one side come forth on the other ranged in the perfect, delicate fabric, with the richest pattern of ferns and flowers all wrought out in it without a flaw. Now no one can look on that machine at work without knowing that the harmonious working of all its parts interlocked in their unswerving order, is due to unity of

will and purpose controlling the movements of the whole.

And when we turn from these contrivances of men to the great field of nature, we find everywhere groups of movements, more complex indeed than those of any lace-machine, yet presenting a perfection of orderliness and mutual adaptation surpassing that of any work that has ever come from the hand of man.

Look on the movements of the heavenly bodies. So absolutely orderly is the march of the moon around the earth and of the earth around the sun that an eclipse can be foretold exactly to the moment centuries beforehand. See how surely the stars retain their relative positions in the heavens. Well might the old Hebrew say "Thou bringest out their host by number" and compare them to a great army whose tramp is ordered by one superintending mind.

But we find the perfect order in the extraordinarily minute no less than in the extraordinarily vast. In the tiny laying on of cell to cell which constitutes the growth of all living structures there is a constant following of a design which displays itself at last in the perfect plant or animal.

Indeed, the whole modern conception of the universe is of an existence displaying oneness

in the power that has produced it and carries it on. There is not a scientific man in all the world who will not insist on that. All different forms of life are gradually being shown to have grown out of one primeval form,—indeed, in the minute amœba beneath the microscope we can see with our own eyes almost exactly what that form was. And the science teachers are not content now, as they used to be, to point out the wonderful similarity between the skeletons of a man and a frog; but they gather the molluscs, too, and the insects of the air, and even the plants themselves into one great family with mankind.

Why, it is hinted in our day that really there is but one substance all the universe through, and that the differences in quality—in consistency, in weight, in colour, in taste, in smell—may be made after all solely by differences in the packing of the atoms or in the speed and the direction of the motions of the infinitesimal particles which constitute all substance. And the marvellous revelations of spectrum analysis assure us that away in the most distant stars the substances constituting them are arranged into much the same varieties as here, iron and other metals, hydrogen and other gases familiar to us upon this ball of earth.

Nay, science teaches us that gravitation and magnetism and heat and electricity and all those modes of physical energy which we are accustomed to talk of as so many different forces, are really only so many fashions in which the one sole force exhibits itself, and can be changed from one into another at pleasure. So that science is bringing us to precisely the same position which our interrogation of the necessary laws of our thought brought us to at the beginning of this chapter, and teaching us to gather up all force under one name;—and the only possible name is Will.

To sum up all, then, that is contended for in this chapter, we are compelled by the build of our own thinking faculty, to believe that the infinite motions which make up this stupendous universe—motions of giant suns through space, motions of minutest molecules of gas dashed in countless myriads against my eyelid millions of times a second—are the effect of Will akin to our own, and that that Will is one and the same Will here and everywhere, both now and through all time. This only remains to say: *We call this Will, this living, energising Power,*—"GOD."

And when now we look out upon this universe at last as the sphere of the causative energy

of God, imagination is overwhelmed before the revelation which our understanding has forced upon us. The most powerful telescopes ever constructed reveal on what we are tempted to call the very outskirts of creation gleams of dusty light made up of what seem minutest points of luminous matter. Some of these clouds of light are indeed not yet revealed by our telescopes as true stars; but others of them are certainly clusters of suns many times larger than the giant sun which sheds light and heat upon the earth. Yet this familiar sun itself is of such stupendous bulk that the earth and the moon might be shut up inside it, and the moon could still revolve round the earth at the same distance as she does at present. The actual size of the sun is one and a half million times that of the earth. And we know that the light which takes eight minutes to reach us from our own sun has taken at the same rate many thousands of years to reach us from some of those glimmering specks of luminosity beyond. And no man can say that even they are any nearer to the boundaries of creation than we are ourselves. And no man can name any number within the category of human language which the number of the suns may not probably exceed. The stars that

human eyes have seen are twenty million. And this God-Will rules and governs from second to second throughout even from the beginning if ever a beginning was, on to the end if ever end shall be. And by that Will the same metals, the same gases prevail in all the worlds, differentiated probably solely by differing motions of their ultimate particles. And of those particles you may perhaps write "3" with twenty "o's" after it to every cubic inch, so far as the gases are concerned. And each particle is dashing its twenty miles, more or less, a minute, backwards and forwards, on its own course, which is different from the course of every other particle in creation, through all the hours and days and years and centuries and æons. And it is the One God who makes and keeps this so.

When we allow ourselves for a moment to contemplate this pervading and embracing Will, it must indeed fill us with awe to reflect that we also stand beside God mysteriously endowed with the prerogative of will. Minute truly does the field of our action appear in contrast; but yet we also are living wills with the distinct prerogatives of initiative and purpose, able to produce movements by our own spontaneous choice, and therefore more akin to God the

Creator than to the pebbles and the rocks and the mountains and the stars which are only the material which the Supreme Will wields.

It will always remain a question answered differently by different classes of thinkers how far beasts and cattle, fish and fowl, and things that creep upon the earth, themselves possess or are spontaneous, self-determining wills, like Man, or how far they are rather the subjects through which acts a higher will and purpose than their own. But whatever we may say about the ordinary intelligence which animals display in individual acts, there are some actions habitual to them to which a higher intelligence than anyone is inclined to attribute to them is absolutely essential; and therefore also a higher directing will. The marvellous architecture of the bee and the wasp affords one of the most familiar instances of this. No one really supposes that these insects have worked out those geometrical problems which must nevertheless have been understood by the intelligence which prompts them to build up their cells in their perfect hexagonal form. And therefore we seem compelled to think of that Intelligence and Will by which the stars are poised and the flowers bloom as also entering into these busy workers and guiding all their wondrous toil.

The whole question of what instinct is and how it has come about is indeed too wide and difficult to be encountered at the end of a chapter. Recent science has modified our view of it in many ways. But it has been my desire in this present chapter, while exhibiting the Will of God as the only conceivable cause behind the infinite motions of inanimate creation, to suggest also that there may be animate movements as well which cannot be adequately explained by referring them to the will and purpose of the creature, but must find their solution, like the revolution of the planets and the thrill and throb of the infinitesimal molecules of gas, in the direct energising Will of the Creator.

CHAPTER III.

THE WITNESS OF CONSCIENCE.

The idea of God impressed upon us by that Witness of the Understanding on which I have dwelt is assuredly most sublime. The conception of that eternal and universal Energy is calculated to waken in us a vivid sense of our own smallness, and an awful consciousness that this mighty living Force can and must control us with a control from which there is no appeal. We realise that we are in the power of God, that there is no escape from his rule, that by his breath we are made alive, and that by his touch our bodies may die to-morrow or to-day. Nay, the discovery of Law predominating everywhere as the expression of the Supreme Will and the habit of its action, the discovery that the tremendous modes of energy called gravitation, electricity, heat, and so forth, never vary from the established method of their action, that an Alexander, a Napoleon, a Gordon, a Wolseley, with all his host, is as absolutely subject to them as a butterfly or a

moth—all this brings the sense of dependence, of powerlessness before God, to the fore-front of our minds, and may well fill the stoutest heart with awe.

And the sense of dependence, the feeling of awe in the presence of illimitable power is one element in what men call Religion.

And yet the discussions in the preceding chapter belong after all rather to philosophy than to religion. The whole appeal was to the reasoning faculty in us, to the intellectual constitution of our minds. In obedience to that constitution, we were seeking the *Cause* of the infinitely varied phenomena or movements in nature; and in obedience to that constitution, we concluded that the only possible Cause is One Living Will,—or, to give that Will the accepted name, is *God*.

Now a man may acknowledge all this to the full, and yet he may be neither a man who seeks to live righteously nor yet a man who knows the deep peace of God. The philosophical conviction of God as the Infinite and Eternal Cause does not of itself make men good; it does not of itself make men lovers of God. And as for the awful sense of the irresistible might of God, that by itself is as likely to make desperadoes as righteous men,

as likely to fill men's hearts with terror as with religious affection.

Moreover, though to us it may seem plain that the facts of nature necessitate a God behind nature, though we find ourselves compelled to think of the great Cause as a Living Will, as God; yet we cannot but perceive that there are numbers of clever men who do not acknowledge any such compulsion, and who contend that in following the natural bent of our minds in this matter, we are giving way to what may be no better than a baseless superstition.

In pointing out this fact, I am very far from admitting that this attitude on the part of some thinkers ought to shake our confidence in what we find to be the necessary laws of our own thought. I believe that such an attitude is altogether abnormal, and is due solely to certain personal conditions of these particular men which will occupy our attention in a future chapter. They are either under a violent reaction from the false conceptions of God which have descended to us from a less scientific age, or else they are under the influence of a special line of study which has weakened the natural repugnance of the intellect to rest satisfied with alleged causes which do not refer to a living will; probably they are biased by both

these conditions at once. But that does not absolve us from recognising the fact that there are able and accomplished men who admit no such natural necessity as we find ourselves under, to refer the phenomena of the universe to a living will as their only conceivable source.

Thus we are a long way as yet from having got at an adequate Religion. First, what we have got at is more philosophy than religion; secondly, so far as it is religion, it is not a religion that necessarily makes for moral goodness or for spiritual peace; thirdly, there are some who question our assumption that the necessity of our minds to conceive the Supreme Cause as Living Will is a real necessity or one in which we may legitimately acquiesce.

Can we then discover God in any other way? Is any other line of witness open to us which shall supply what the simple interrogation of the laws of Cause cannot supply?

Let us observe an order of facts quite apart from those which we have contemplated hitherto. We have been dwelling entirely on the movements in the outward universe; let us turn to certain inward motions of our own spiritual being.

Have you ever yielded to some great and

strong temptation? Alas! which of us can say that he has not? And what stands out most vividly in our memories about the moments immediately succeeding? Is it the pleasure, the gain, the gratification which we grasped? That pleasure or gain seemed to us immediately before so precious that for its sake we did that which we knew to be wrong. And yet it is not that enjoyment that we remember with the keenest memory. No; it is rather a certain poignant dissatisfaction which supervened upon us even though quite unanticipated by us. The gratification was all spoilt by a strange, miserable sense of *unworthiness*, in the presence of which real pleasure could not live a moment. And this came upon us, did it not, independently of any reasoning of ours with ourselves or any voluntary turning on our part to better things. It was not that deliberate reflection showed us how wrong we had been; it was that, altogether without will of ours, reproach was heaped upon us, as though a voice of some holy one were borne in upon our soul.

Or let us turn to a happier experience. Have you ever, in spite of severe temptation to act otherwise, done in some moment of great trial the deed which you felt to be the purest, the noblest, the worthiest? Thank God! few of us

are without some such memory as that. And how was it with us immediately after the die was cast and we had chosen well? Perhaps that choice involved giving up some great delight on which we had set our hearts. Perhaps it involved undertaking some painful labour from which our weak flesh shrank. If so, the time immediately following our firm decision must have been, one would think, a time in which we had a sense of painful blank or of painful burden. But was it really so? On the contrary, there came to us a sweet and wonderful peacefulness of heart which we had by no means counted on. For the moment, there was a clear sense of having come into harmony with the best, of living *true life*, which was worth more to us by far than the ease or the gratification which we had foregone. I will not say that it was a sense of merit or even of worthiness; but it was a sense of peace, as though one whose approval we cared for much, whispered to our secret spirit, "My child, you have done well!"

But the sense that we are rebuked when we have done ill, and the sense that we are approved when we have done well, do not exhaust the order of experiences which we are now recalling. That order of experiences has

not only to do with the moments following good or evil conduct, but also with those prior moments in which temptation to evil or opportunity for good presents itself.

We have all had our seasons of urgent and terrible temptation. You remember that solemn and searching passage in the Apostle Paul's great Letter to the Romans, the burden of which is, "Not what I would, that do I practise; but what I hate, that I do," and again, "The good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise." And this sad confession on the lips of the very greatest and noblest of all the band who, loving Christ, planted Christianity in the world, is echoed surely on the lips of all men who even now long to be good and true, yet yesterday and to-day and to-morrow fail and fall and do what they hate.

And this lamentable experience of even earnest-minded men springs from the awful potency of what we call temptation. At certain moments of our lives wrong acts suggest themselves and somehow seem to have so much excuse, to be so little wrong and so very pleasant, or so convenient, or so much the easiest way out of a difficulty, or so fit a satisfaction for some passion that is lurking in us,

that the inclination to commit them comes over us with an almost overwhelming force. But when the man is on the very point of yielding suddenly there will come to him an urgent demand that he shall not act so. It is as though the hand of a friend were laid upon his arm to restrain him, or as though some kind guardian spoke in his ear the grave word of warning. And happy is the man if he is turned from his purpose by this counsellor who speaks to his spirit out of the unseen.

But yet again sometimes it is rather a sudden opportunity of good that comes to a man than a solicitation to positive evil. It may be that flood or fire presents him with the sudden chance of saving a human life; it may merely be that a word spoken between strangers in a railway carriage opens out to him the occasion by which a fellow-man may be "instructed, assisted, or comforted." In one case the love of his own life dissuades him powerfully from the deed; in the other the shrinkings of diffidence disincline him to throw in the word. And he would let the opportunity slip, were it not that out of the air, as it were, by no spontaneous movement of his own, there comes a command which will leave him no peace, to turn him to the rescue or to speak the words

of enlightenment or counsel. He turns his steps away, but the importuning voice will not be silenced till he turns again and makes the perilous plunge; or he buries his face in the newspaper, but the columns make no sense because there is a voice at his heart bidding him again and again to open his lips and say his say.

Thus within the experience of everyone of us there is this notable quadruple phenomenon, that when we have opportunity of doing that which is good, and when we have temptation to do that which is evil, and when we have done the deed which it was right to do, and when we have done the deed which it was wrong to do,—in each and all of these four cases,—there supervenes upon us, making right across the current of our own spontaneity, a voice, as it were, of exhortation or of warning, of approval or of rebuke, which is not our own, which we have not led up to, which yet asserts over us an authority which we are not able to gainsay. It is a "Power, not ourselves, that makes for Righteousness."

What account then are we to give of this silent "voice," this command, this prohibition, this speechless "well done," or "shame on you," dropping upon us like the sun-shine or the rain from heaven?

There is a beautiful incident in the child-life of Theodore Parker, familiar perhaps to most of those into whose hands this book will fall, which, however, can hardly be too often told. We will read it once more in the words in which the brave preacher himself told it long years after it had happened.

"When a little boy in petticoats, in my fourth year, one fine day in spring my father led me by the hand to a distant part of the farm, but soon sent me home alone. On the way I had to pass a little "pond-hole" then spreading its waters wide. A rhodora in full bloom—a rare plant in my neighbourhood, and which grew only in that locality—attracted my attention and drew me to the spot. I saw a little spotted tortoise sunning himself in the shallow water at the root of the flaming shrub. I lifted the stick I had in my hand to strike the harmless reptile; for though I had never killed any creature, yet I had seen other boys out of sport destroy birds, squirrels, and the like; and I felt a disposition to follow their wicked example. But all at once something checked my little arm, and a voice within me said clear and loud, "It is wrong." I held my uplifted stick in wonder at the new emotion —the consciousness of an involuntary but inward check upon my actions—till the tortoise and the rhodora both vanished from my sight. I hastened home and told the tale to my mother, and asked what it was that told me it was wrong. She wiped a tear from her eye with her apron, and, taking me in her arms, said, 'Some men call it conscience; but I prefer to call it the voice of God in the soul of man. If you listen

and obey it, then it will speak clearer and clearer, and always guide you right; but if you turn a deaf ear, or disobey, then it will fade out little by little, and leave you all in the dark and without a guide. Your life depends on your heeding this little voice.' She went her way, careful and troubled about many things, but doubtless pondered them in her motherly heart; while I went off to wonder and to think it over in my poor childish way. But I am sure no event in my life has made so deep and lasting an impression on me." *

"Some men call it conscience; but I prefer to call it the voice of God in the soul of man." So spoke the simple piety of the good New England mother. Could any philosopher have given a profounder answer?

No; there is no solution more simple, more wise, more true. These impressions, vivid, often sudden, powerful, authoritative, have in them all the marks which belong to the communication of thought or feeling from one mind to another. They *interrupt* the sequence of the man's own thought and feeling. They break in upon him. The most natural explanation is that they really are communications direct to us from some Mind that reads our life as an open book and from whom we cannot flee away. If there were no other witness of God to the soul of

* The Life and Teachings of Theodore Parker. By Peter Dean. p. 6. Compare Weiss and Frothingham.

man save this, still this would suffice to assure him of the perpetual presence of an unseen, penetrating Spirit in mysterious fellowship with him.

But is it really to be conceived that this Spirit thus by some unseen channel holding communication with us is indeed the great and awful God,—that all-encompassing Being who, by the witness of the understanding, was revealed to us as the causal Will from whom the unmeasured universe proceeds? Is it indeed conceivable that he who spreads the curtain of the night, whose is the brightness of the day, he who stretches his shaping hand over all the paths of the great deep of the circling stars, can speak to a man, the child of a day, to me with my faint and feeble life, to the little Theodore when his baby arm is lifted in childish play? Is not he too great? Are not we too small?

What was that Jesus said? "Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and not one of them shall fall on the ground without your Father: but the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore; ye are of more value than many sparrows." And have not we an exactly parallel argument all ready to our hands? We *know*—as we saw in the preceding chapter—that the same Supreme Will,

the one sole God, who sends suns circling round their mighty orbit and poises starry systems in ordered balance across the heaven of heavens, also none the less moves the sap up the daisy-stem, nay, compels the myriad million molecules to swing to and fro within a particle of air. Great and small, vast and minute are purely relative terms, and are measured along the line of our human consciousness. To that Supreme Thought there is nothing large in the circle that holds within it the countless worlds of the Milky Way, and there is nothing little in the jagged steeps and plains that make the circumference of a grain of sand. We may imagine that he who arranges the globes in their places can hold converse with none but mighty beings who wing their way from sphere to sphere, angels and archangels surpassing the ken of man. But he whose Will is energising always on every molecule of outward nature, may well press in upon the inward consciousness of the individual man. Indeed, if we have once really grasped and realised the conception of the Will-Force of God acting at every moment on every particle of matter, it is almost impossible to conceive of that same God as *not* entering into communication with every conscious being which is by nature capable of receiving the

communications of Mind other than itself.

Conscience then, with its four-fold appeal to our inward life, is in fact no other than the pressure of the All-pervading Spirit, whom men name God, upon our consciousness.

But it may be said that such a view implies very arbitrary action on the part of God; since, however vividly we may recall at one time or another in our lives such experiences as I have described, yet at other times there has been no such keen sensitiveness on our part to the striking of the divine voice on our spiritual ear. It may even be said that there are many men who have no such experiences whatsoever, in whom they have been utterly deadened or who have never been alive to them at all. Be it so. This mode of action of the Supreme is, like every mode of divine action, carried on always in accordance with unvarying law. Our consciousness of the appeal to us of the unseen Monitor must depend on spiritual conditions in ourselves. What those spiritual conditions are, I suppose no man can say. We have not attained to the mapping out of law in the spiritual sphere as we have to some degree in the physical; and therefore to us there may be the *appearance* of arbitrariness or caprice. But none the less, if we *could* exactly define and

observe the conditions of the human spirit, we should surely find that if the voice of God breaks upon the soul under such and such conditions, always under the like conditions it will break upon it again.

And the recognition that it is God who speaks to man in conscience is at the same time the revelation to us of a new fact in God—a fact of supreme moment—which it might have taken long to ascertain if we had only known him as Causal Will. It reveals to us that God is Righteous.

In God as Causal Will we trace hints of some vast Purpose threading together the ages. Even the hapless hero of Locksley Hall sang—

> Yet I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs.

The sublime drama shadowed forth by the great modern doctrine of Evolution exhibits a universe slowly, surely, steadfastly moving forward from the dim beginnings when shapeless vapour floated over space, by gatherings round nuclei, and differentiations, and processes of germinating life, and separations of living things into kinds, and upgrowth of the higher genera, and appearance at last of man, and his upgrowth again in knowledge and skill, and dividings even of mankind into the higher races and the lower,—moving

forward toward some goal, some "far off divine event," which no man can yet foresee. One who had never recognised God save as Causal Will would—were he a good observer—still become conscious that that Will was working towards a Purpose. But now comes a flash of light upon this dim, dark, purpose; and it comes even through the revelation of God in the human conscience. The end which God loves and seeks, the end

Towards which the whole creation moves,

is *Righteousness*.

This seems clear the moment we recognise that it is God who urges us to do the right and approves us when we do it, who dissuades us from the wrong and shames us when we have transgressed. His *importunity* with us about Right and Wrong is the proof that he *cares* about it. We have no sense of the same importunity on the part of the unseen Spirit that we should or should not do things which in themselves have no moral quality and are neither right nor wrong. It is only when there are two courses of action open to us of which one is morally better than the other that God seems to interfere and supersede our ordinary motives by this strange urgency of command or prohibition.

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I have spoken several times of our feeling the dictates of conscience to be *authoritative*. We feel an *obligation* to obey them. It is in the very nature of conscience that we feel it has a *right* to direct us. We feel that we owe *allegiance* to the source from which it comes.

This quite special element in our experience of the workings of conscience is of itself sufficient to indicate that its behests are the behests of a Living Being. Even if conscience never broke upon us with that sudden interruption of our own personal stream of feeling which we have noted, if its impressions worked into the web of our mental life without any other marks of issuing from outside ourselves, the sense of obligation which it carries with it would be a witness that it expresses our relations with a Being, other than ourselves. For obligation and authority imply that there are *two* concerned,—a higher and a lower. If I am under obligation to take a certain course, I must be under obligation to *some one*; the word has no meaning else. If I recognise authority legitimately commanding me, it must be *some one's* authority. No mere self-interest of my own could create these elements of moral consciousnes. And if I ask *who* is he to whom

I am bound by this obligation, *who* is he who writes on my very soul this sense of his authority, what answer can there be save "*God*"? No other could impress me so vividly with his inalienable *right* to dictate my course. To defy the authority of any other—even of the unanimous voice of all my fellow-men—could never overwhelm me with so miserable a sense of shame.

There are certain objections to the recognition of conscience as truly the utterance of God, which are urged so persistently that it will be well to notice them before we close this chapter.

It is said that if conscience really expressed the divine command, all men's consciences would direct them to the same actions. But as a matter of fact we find the very widest differences of judgment as to what is right conduct and what is wrong conduct. Whole regions of conduct which the savage thinks right, the civilized man thinks wrong. The moral standard shifts from generation to generation all down the course of history. The Spartan thought theft a manly accomplishment: the one shameful thing was to be found out. Some of the writers of the Pentateuch and Judges esteemed it a most wicked thing in the

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great captains of Israel to spare their captives from the sword. The Romans looked upon suicide as at least morally indifferent, if not a noble act. The Inquisitors held it the most sacred duty of the faithful Christian to see to the due burning of heretics. We read of tribes among whom it was deemed only an act of filial piety for a man to bury his grandmother before she succumbed to old age; and the European traveller, meeting the procession on the way to such a ceremony, and venturing to remonstrate, was rebuked by no one so vehemently as by the old lady herself, whom he sought to deprive of her ancestral rights. Even among the same people at the same hour the most divergent moral judgments are current. When young men's Debating Societies discuss "whether it is ever right to tell a lie," the suffrages are pretty evenly divided. Many men who would on no temptation cheat an individual, hold themselves blameless if they cheat a company. And while some Englishmen deem it a shameful thing for a minister in the solemn worship of God to utter phrases which he does not believe, Mr. Henry Sidgwick, a man justly honoured, though he "cannot but regard it as an evil that a clergyman should speak in church any words that he cannot speak with sincerity,"

still thinks (or thought) it "an evil that we must accept," and only desires to make "our conceptions as clear as possible in respect of the amount of deviation from strict sincerity to be permitted." *

Amid such a babel of deliverances on moral questions, who will say that all these deliverances are of God?

Assuredly no one. Conscience, in the proper sense of the word,—at any rate that conscience which we are now claiming to be the voice of God,—does not declare *what* act is right or *what* act is wrong. It is confined to the recognition that there *is* a right and a wrong, that whatever is right constitutes worthy conduct, whatever is wrong, unworthy conduct, and that between the two there is a great gulf fixed. To decide whether this or that course of conduct is right or wrong is a task for our own judgment just as much as to decide whether land at a rent of two pounds an acre is dear or cheap. Our judgment may indeed be assisted by certain habits of mind which have been consolidated in us in the course of many generations. Mercy, purity, truthfulness—these god-like qualities and others—the whole force of our nature declares

* The Ethics of Conformity and Subscription. P. 29.

to be good. But it was not always so. Each of these beautiful dispositions had a long struggle in the dim beginnings of history before it won general recognition as good; and even now conduct which directly contradicts each and all of these sometimes displays itself to us in such disguise that we do not recognise its wickedness, but imagine it to be consonant with the law of God. Those revelations of God to the soul of man by which he has gradually come to know that mercy and purity and integrity are good and beautiful, and that cruelty, passion and fraud are against the Holy Spirit, will come under our notice in the chapter on "The Place of the Prophet." Those revelations are quite distinct from the ordinary workings of conscience. The fact with which we have now to do is this: that the moment we have clearly made up our minds that this is right, and that that is wrong,—that moment the voice the authority of which we cannot gainsay, urges us to the one and dissuades us from the other. And when, for the moment, our habitual and deliberate moral judgments fade away from our consciousness under the stress of fear, of desire, or of any passion, this voice recalls us with its imperial command to our better mind.

The moral choice always presents itself to us

as a choice between a more worthy and a less worthy conduct. The reasoning by which we decide in a particular case which is the more worthy and which the less may indeed be mistaken reasoning. But whichever it be that seems to us the more worthy,—that we know that we *ought* to pursue. And that small word "ought" which slips from the lips so easily, defines our moral relation to the righteous God whose claim upon our allegiance it implies.

When God thus seeks to guide us on our way, let us remember that great word spoken by one of old in whose mighty soul the voice of conscience sounded as a trumpet-call: "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." By a prophet of a yet older time we hear the solemn promise which rang in the ears of the children of Israel: "I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes; and ye shall keep my judgments and do them. And ye shall be my people and I will be your God."

May not each one of us fitly cry with Charles Wesley:

> I want a principle within
> Of jealous, godly fear;
> A sensibility of sin,
> A pain to feel it near.

I want the first approach to feel
  Of pride, or fond desire;
To catch the wand'ring of my will,
  And quench the kindling fire.

That I from Thee no more may part,
  No more thy goodness grieve,
The filial awe, the fleshly heart,
  The tender conscience give.

Quick as the apple of an eye,
  O God, my conscience make!
Awake my soul when sin is nigh,
  And keep it still awake.

CHAPTER IV.

THE WITNESS OF THE SPIRIT.

So far we have seen that God reveals himself to us as the Cause behind all the movements of the Universe; and when we realise what those movements are, that revelation is unspeakably impressive. We have also seen that he reveals himself to us in Conscience as the Approver of all Righteousness and the Hater of all Unrighteousness; and that thought also fills our minds with awe. But even this does not give us all that men mean by Religion. We want to know whether there is any more intimate way of knowing God. Religious people love God, and are sure that he loves them. Is there any experience of ours which teaches us too to love him, or carries the conviction to our hearts that he loves us?

Let us see.

Suppose you have had one of those weary days which most of us know sometimes,—a day in which everything has seemed to go wrong from morning to night, a day in which

all the world seems to jar, and no one about you seems to do or to say the right thing; a day in fact of worry and vexation, of impatience, gloom and fretfulness. You are out of temper at the end of it, and inclined to put the blame on every thing and everybody but yourself; and for the moment, at any rate, it seems to you that life is most certainly not worth living. You feel that you have not been treated properly and are not thought enough of; you are out of humour with the world and with mankind.

Have you known such days? Well, then, has it ever chanced to you in the evening, to pass out of the hot room alone under the quiet summer skies? On the lawn or the broad common, with the breeze softly fanning your heated brow, you look up and around. The great stars have come out silently in the darkening sky. The busy hum of day is hushed in the stillness of the night. No foot-fall strikes upon your ear. You are alone,—you and that tumult in your breast. But even as you lift your eyes to the wondrous majesty of the heavens, lo! suddenly a new sense wakens in your spirit. All suddenly the load slips off your heart, and peace steals swiftly, surely on your soul. The discord is solved, and

life just now jarring and discordant, slides into perfect harmony. Alone? No, you know that you are not alone. A presence that is all love and peace and strength has found you out. It is as though one, perfect in strength and goodness, spoke in your secret ear and said, "Behold, I am with you; I care for you and will help you; all is well."

And somehow in that moment you have become a new man. You can only think with shame of what you were those few minutes ago. A deep and sweet humility takes hold of you; and yet a sense of strength and gladness which was far from you before.

Now that Presence, that Power of new peace and strength, that voice piercing through all the crust of your hardness and resentment and thrilling the secret places of your being, I call God; and I say that God, the Holy Spirit, the Father, has spoken to you and made you know that he is there.

I want you to distinguish this way in which God gets at you and makes you know him quite clearly from that first method of revealing himself which we discussed, namely, the revelation of himself as the Cause which our reason demands for the phenomena of the universe. This is altogether a different matter.

There it was your understanding that was appealed to, your thinking faculty which is so constituted that when you see movement you cannot help thinking of some living, conscious Will, like your own, as the cause of it. But that of which we are now speaking is purely an experience of the emotions, the feeling faculty in you, which is not the same thing as the thinking faculty. I am not now referring to any reasoning in your mind about cause at all, but to the sudden *feeling* of the tender, mighty, protective presence which penetrates you, and makes you sure of God's love, and sets you quite at rest.

It is not of course the vision of the starry heaven only that may bring this blessed assurance suddenly sweeping over the soul. I have only spoken of that because it is the highest type of all the beautiful or sublime sights in the treasure-house of nature. It may be the glow and glory of a golden sunset or the yet more lovely after-glow which it often leaves; it may be the stately moon seen through the driving clouds; it may be the snowy crest of a great mountain bathed in that mysterious pink glow which Alpine travellers can never forget; it may be the speaking silence of a vast, dark forest; it may be a river, or the sea, or simply a quiet

meadow where the cattle browse, or even a few road-side flowers; it may be the carolling of the birds, or the bells across the water, or some mighty peal of music, or the smile of a little child, that finds us out—*finds* us, as Coleridge expresses it—and makes us *feel* the divine presence so suddenly and so surely. Different minds are sensitive to different influences. Some are moved more by sight, some by sound; some by the awful and majestic, some by the lovely and very simple. But it is the same fact at bottom with all. It is this same wonderful power in the outward things to be the medium, the agency, the instrument, through which the Unseen Power impresses himself upon our inward consciousness, and makes us feel sure of him and trust him and love him.

Moreover, undoubtedly some are much more sensitive to such influences than others. To some this beautiful experience is frequent, to some it is very rare. To some it is intensely vivid, to some comparatively faint. Into the lives of some it enters more and more as the years roll by; from the lives of others it fades away to be at last forgotten and disbelieved. But I cannot think that any thoughtful and earnest men or women have been entirely without experiences such as I have described or

akin to them; and with all to whom they have been given I say that they belong to the very centre and essence of religion; that the prophets themselves have been prophets only in proportion as God penetrated their souls in this way, and they have faithfully declared to the people that which they have heard and known.

Observe how such experiences as I have described often strike quite counter to the whole current of a man's thoughts and feelings at the same moment, nothing in him leading up to them, the whole movement of his own heart being at the time vehemently the other way. But the current is suddenly struck back, so that it is impossible to think of it as his own doing, and there is nothing for it but to believe that some other force than that of his own mind has been brought to bear on him; and what more simple or natural explanation can you give than that of which he himself is intuitively convinced, that it is the mind of God that has struck in and seized his own mind captive?

It seems to me that some of the fundamental truths of religion come home to us with new force, if we let ourselves think of the visible universe, the heavens and the wide-

stretching world, as being in a sense the face or countenance of God. And then the parallelism between our way of interpreting the countenances of the friends we see and the way we may interpret the countenance of the great Unseen Friend, comes out very clearly indeed. "The friends we see," I have written; but, after all, do we ever really see any friend of ours? What we see is his form, his face, his countenance. We never see himself, the real inward self which we call our friend. But we learn to know all about him, his friendship and love towards us, by looking on the outward face which we do see; for the expression that passes over that face, the look in the eyes, the smile on the lips, make us to know quite certainly the feelings of the unseen man behind. Yes, what the eyes say, and the expression says, we trust and believe yet more readily than words. We feel that it is this by which we really *know* our friend. For many others may speak to us the same words of regard as he, or even stronger ones, and yet we do not believe them; for there is no persuasion for us in their countenance. A look of the eyes, a grasp of the hand, tells us more than whole hours of speech.

And that is what I should always try to

remember when men say to me that there can be no certainty about God's revelations of himself to us unless they are in actual words. Many good men think that the way the prophets of old were so sure of God was because he actually spoke to them in articulate speech which their outward ears could hear; and that we ourselves only have certain knowledge of him because the Bible has what he said to them all written down for us in black and white. But is that true to our experience with human friends? Are not the surest messages of all those that spring directly from heart to heart, when, as we say, we "read our friend's soul in his eyes"? Should we be surer of him if instead of looking into our face, he wrote down the declaration of his friendship in a letter and handed it to us, or even if he put it into words and spoke it? Do we not often say that the best things are "too deep for words"? And if it is so between friend and friend among ourselves, shall it not be so between us and God? And shall not the Supreme Friend, the All-Lover, look down upon us, look us through and through, from the glorious heavens, with a countenance that expresses in the surest of all language unspeakable things?

Just the same kind of keen sense of God's

loving presence which is so often conveyed by the ministry of the fair universe which expresses his goodness will take hold of men of some temperaments without the intervention of outward nature at all. When the heart is weighed down with despondency and it almost seems for the moment as if there were no God, the eye falls perhaps on a verse of some dear old hymn or a familiar phrase of Psalm or Gospel, and at once the load is lifted off the heart, and the certainty of God floods the mind like a strong, full tide. Nay, this beautiful spiritual experience may come without even a word of hymn or Bible helping to bring it about. If only when a man's heart is full of complaint, or bitterness, or wrong, he will sit down quietly and cast out of his mind the things that are hurting him, and just "be still," he will often find that the re-action soon sets in and that God makes himself felt and known then and there quite surely. That is the deep truth that lies in the exquisite words of the ancient Psalm, "Be still and know that I am God." It is the Holy Spirit himself that takes possession of us and persuades and convinces us in a way that makes mere *argument* seem poor and trivial work. Paul knew these experiences well when he wrote,

"The Spirit himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God."

This Witness of the Spirit is best described not as making men *believe*, but as making them *know;* and those who have received it do not so much *believe in* God, as *know* God.

In that delightful story "Vida," by "Amy Dunsmuir," there is a little conversation between Vida and her old play-fellow, Arthur, which brings this out. Arthur has been in London and has met with people who do not believe in God at all, and he himself is shaken and bewildered.

"But Arthur," said Vida, "we don't need to talk about all this, because one thing I can tell you—there is a God." Vida spoke with certainty in the tone of one who was contributing an important fact to the discussion. The quiet confidence with which she spoke made no small impression on Arthur. He started a little.

"How do you know that"? he asked almost sharply.

"Because I know someone who knows Him," replied Vida readily. "And He is not hard or unkind, Arthur; I always used to think He must be. He is good and very loving, but I should think very few people know Him. Mr. Jeffrey does. It was he that I meant; and I think Nannie knows him too. One Sunday last summer, Mr. Jeffrey preached for Papa, and it was then he told us about God. It was not the least like *preaching*. It was telling us things that

he really *knew*, you know. I don't remember—I can't tell you what he said, but he just showed us what God is like; and I have known ever since then that God is a real person, and He is very kind. If I needed Him at any time, I would try to find Him. I would'nt be afraid of Him now."

"But then," said Arthur, "Mr. Jeffrey may believe all that, but he is only one man; and think of the numbers of people who don't believe it."

"That doesn't matter; I mean it makes no difference. Why, Arthur, if one person told you he had seen something—a person you could trust—you would believe it, though no one else in the world might have happened to see it. A thing must be *there*, for even one person to see it."

"And you think," said Arthur slowly, "that because Mr. Jeffrey believes in God—"

"It isn't that he *believes in* Him, Arthur. He *knows* Him, as you know me. I think he knows Him better than any one else, for he is very shy with other people. If Mr. Jeffrey went to London and preached to those people that you know, they would see that there must be a God." *

The difference between this Witness of the Spirit and the Witness of the Understanding is illustrated by the fact that it is just in those circumstances in which the understanding is most likely to be bewildered and baffled that the spiritual witness often comes out most clearly. For the experience of mankind for

* Vida, p. 175.

many centuries shows that it is when men are in deep sorrow or great pain that they are often most sure of God, and that what are, if measured by any outward standard the saddest lives, are also very often the richest in religious peace. If our knowledge of God depended altogether on reasoning, this surely would not be so; for it would be strange reasoning that should make men most certain of a good God ruling their lives just when pain and sorrow are heaviest. But the persuasion that so often turns sorrow into peace and pain into sweetness is not a reasoned, an argued persuasion; it is the result of the fact that in pain and sorrow human nature is most sensitive to the touch of God upon the soul, most alive to the inpouring of his Spirit.

And so in one of the sublimest of Christian writings — the fourth Gospel — the Spirit is spoken of as "The Comforter;" for it is pre-eminently as a Comforter that the divine Spirit thus finds men out; and he is also spoken of as the Spirit of Truth, since at no time is the human spirit capable of receiving into its own life so much of the eternal Truth of God, as when God himself thus speaks to the soul as the Comforter in the day of sorrow. It is then of all times that man understands God best.

One of the most beautiful hymns in our language describes the apprehending of God after the manner I had in mind in the earlier part of the present chapter, — the wonderful sense of his presence that is brought to us in the midst of the still loveliness of nature.

Let us understand that the experience which it describes is not something poetic, fanciful, or imaginary, but literal and real and true and trustworthy as it is possible for any experience to be.

Hath not thy heart within thee burned
At evening's calm and holy hour,
As if its inmost depth discerned
The presence of a loftier Power?
Hast thou not heard 'mid forest glades,
While ancient rivers murmured by,
A voice from forth the eternal shades,
That spake a present Deity?

* * * *

It was the voice of God, that spake
In silence to thy silent heart;
And bade each holier thought awake,
And every dream of earth depart.
Voice of our God, oh, yet be near!
In low, sweet accents, whisper peace;
Direct us on our pathway here;
Then bid in heaven our wanderings cease.

CHAPTER V.

THE WITNESS THROUGH PRAYER.

We have now taken note of the three great lines of communication by which God makes himself known to the open mind and heart. First, through that irresistible law of our minds which demands a living cause behind all movement, we are compelled to think of a supreme Living Cause behind the whole vast and ordered movement which makes up the universe; and we call that First Cause God. Secondly, we have all experienced the inward commanding and forbidding and the inward peace or remorse resulting from our obedience or disobedience, which are gathered together under the name Conscience; and we call the Being who utters that inward voice God. Thirdly, both in times of our inward tumult and in times of our passive stillness, both by sights and sounds lovely or sublime, and also without any such agency, the unseen Comforter has found us out and we have found him out; and we call that Holy Spirit God. So that in

our intellectual life and in our moral life and in our emotional life—that is in every several department of our inward manhood—God impresses himself upon our consciousness and we become aware of him.

Now in all these cases God has communicated himself to us without any previous movement on our own part towards him. Let us inquire in the present Chapter whether there is any intercourse possible between God and ourselves which is not so one-sided,—whether we may in any way speak to him as he speaks to us, and whether, if we do, he answers the speech of our souls in any manner which we can recognise and make part of our lives.

Can we speak to God; and if we do so, will he answer?

You may say, indeed, that there can be no need for us to speak to him; that if he is wise and good, if his almighty power works for righteousness, then anything which we can say to him can answer no good purpose, since he needs not our advice and will certainly not give way to our interference. But if you make this objection, it shows that you have not grasped the idea of God as I have tried, in the last two Chapters, to show that he reveals

himself. We have seen him the All-good, the supremely Righteous; and we have seen him the Comforter who lifts up and sustains the fallen, soothes the spirit of the disturbed, calms and consoles men in sorrow and in pain. But all this amounts to exhibiting him as a Friend to men, one who loves and cares for them.

Now in our relations with our friends, we never ask ourselves what benefit we shall get out of our intercourse with them. We seek that intercourse for its own sake. It is in itself a joy to us. The converse of friend and friend is the purest of all the delights of mankind. If our friend be one whom we recognise as much wiser and better than ourselves, then we say in our hearts when we are with him, as Peter said to Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration, "It is good for us to be here."

The great mistake, which has caused the belief in prayer to be shaken to its foundations in our generation, has been the treatment of prayer as primarily a petition from subject to King, from slave to Master, rather than as the intercourse of friend with Friend, of the little child with the Holy Father.

Let us once more look to the real, the actual experiences of life, and give to them

their simplest, their easiest, their most adequate explanation.

It is a moment of strong and fierce temptation. Some powerful passion solicits you importunately to its indulgence. Whatever passion—anger, greed, any sensual appetite—most often and most fiercely has solicited you, imagine that passion rising up in its might in your heart to carry you along with it. You are as a reed shaken in the wind. You feel as though there were not power in you to resist this masterful force. But you think of God, and you lift up your spirit to him. With clasped hands and moving lips or with motion of the soul alone you seek strength from him. And forthwith the strength flows into you. Passion shrinks away abashed. An unseen power has fought upon your side. You have conquered in the "mortal fray."

Now what is it that has happened? Surely the easiest, the simplest, the most adequate of all explanations is that God has answered your prayer. He has heard your cry and helped you. No facts of modern science, no advances of philosophy, tend in the smallest degree to invalidate that natural conclusion. It is in perfect harmony with all that we know of Man, of Law, of Nature.

Or perhaps it is not with you exactly so. It is not the swoop of passion that imperils you. It is that your life has sunk to a low level. You are living with poor aims. The cares of the world are upon you. The tumult of the market is in your ears, and the dust of the street obscures your sight. You are living in a little world, amid little thoughts, and have fallen away from the true and noble dignity of man. Then one day you become conscious of the degradation in which you are living, and you stretch out your hands to God and ask him to lift you up out of this feebleness into manly strength and energy. And it is as though you breathed a new air; the breath of a new spirit is within you. You rise out of that lowness and the dignity of a child of God is in your life. That great change is best explained by saying that that which seems true to you *is* true, that God has responded to your aspiration, that as you have drawn nigh to God, so he has drawn nigh to you.

Or it may be otherwise again. You have fallen into sin, and remorse is eating at your heart. You are ashamed and there is no peace in you. There seems no hope of the darkness lifting, and in the anguish of your spirit you turn to God and pour out your

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confession to him fully and freely, extenuating nothing, but humbling yourself before him. And, lo! even out of your humiliation comes a great peace. The serene peace of God slides down upon your heart. You are humble still; but the agony of your shame is done away, and with fresh hope and courage you turn to the days to come in which your service may be renewed and your self-respect won back.

Or it may be not a time of moral crisis at all,—simply a time of great and heavy sorrow, of a life's hopes disappointed, of one deeply loved taken from you, so that the words of men are powerless to comfort. Then you kneel by your bedside and speak out your deep affliction to the Father. And though no hope rises that your disappointment shall be reversed or that your dear one shall stand at your side again, yet comfort enters into you. Surely it is the Comforter that visits you,—even the Holy Spirit.

I heard lately of one who after living a beautiful life, died while yet young. She and her circle had renounced the Christian religion and had adopted a very earnest and touching form of faith which sought to dispense wholly with the supernatural or with any object of reverence higher than Humanity. And those

who loved her gathered to commemorate her sweet and gentle life. And he who spoke to them, after the manner of their doctrine, described her brave and noble character, and then said blankly that now for her loss there was *no consolation whatever;* and a great pain fell on those who heard. But what that preacher said *is not true.* It contradicts the *facts* of human experience. Setting aside altogether the comfort which we draw from hopes of reunion with the dead, there is other consolation also. For in the felt companionship of God, in the touch of his fatherly hand upon the soul, there *is* marvellous consolation in every human sorrow, consolation by which even out of grief comes the deeper peace and the manlier strength.

There is Witness of God, then, through Prayer. Man draws nigh to God, and he becomes inwardly conscious that God responding draws nigh to him. If it is reasonable to base any belief whatever on the facts of human experience—and such is the only basis for belief permitted by accurate science—then it is reasonable to base on human experience the belief in an unseen Being whose sympathy with us is close and intimate and who responds to the motions of our own spirits.

This fact of the reality of mutual communion between man and God, conscious converse which man himself can initiate, this phenomenon of Prayer, is a fact and phenomenon so tremendous that it seems as though one who dares to allege its reality should surely construct a long and elaborate argument to sustain its truth. But this great fact, tremendous as it is, is also so absolutely simple that in many words there is danger of "darkening counsel," of rather creating difficulty and confusion than promoting clearness of understanding.

After all, if what we have written in the earlier chapters of God and his relations with Man be true, then the strange thing would be if it were *not* possible for men by their own effort to enter into communication with the Supreme. That he is here with us now and always, that we know; that in every part of our physical frame his power is at this moment active, that we know no less. We know, too, that his habit is through our moral and spiritual faculties to make his presence felt by us. Thus that side of the communion, the action of God on Man, is no longer new to us. The thing which we have not previously noted is the setting up of that action through the

initial act of the man himself, instead of in utter independence of his initiative as in what I have called "the witness of Conscience" and "the witness of the Spirit." Is it then something special and peculiar to Prayer itself that we should be able thus to set, as it were, the divine power in motion, or have we that power in other spheres as well?

Most certainly we have. All human labour is nothing else than so altering the conditions of tangible things as to set the divine power in motion in ways desired by us. So true is this that that noble preacher at Boston, Mr. Savage, goes so far as to call such labour also "Prayer."* The farmer desires a goodly crop and manures and ploughs and sows accordingly, and so sets the forces which God wields energising on the seeds till they shoot and grow and bring forth the golden harvest. Those seeds would have brought forth no increase if the farmer had left them all the long year through piled in a corner of his barn. He has voluntarily subjected them to the life-giving forces of God, and those forces have been freely given in response to the "prayer" of his labour.

And, as to the farmer labouring in his fields,

* Belief in God, by M. J. Savage, p. 132, &c.

so to the soul striving upward in sorrow or remorse, the promise is fulfilled, "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you."

Nevertheless, multitudes of clever men tell us that prayer is a habit destined to pass away because it is founded on false and narrow notions of the laws of this vast universe.

It would be strange indeed, were that to prove so; for prayer in some form or other has been a habit of mankind from the very beginning of the self-conscious life of man. It is an instinct which has become long since an inherent part of his nature. And instincts in men or animals are founded on fact and not on falsehood.

By whatever long process of learning, for example, it has become an instinct in the bee to build every cell six-sided. That instinct has grown out of immemorial experience of the fact that a mass of six-sided cells combines the maximum of strength, compactness, and roominess; and the bee could not, I imagine, in any case have acquired an instinct to build cells with five sides or seven, although there are insects which have *not yet arrived at* the perfection of building, and construct circular or nearly circular cells. So also, by whatever long process

it has become an instinct with this or that species of butterfly to lay her eggs on such and such a plant or tree, it could never have become an instinct, were not the leaf of that very plant or tree the best food for the newly-hatched grub. For instincts are never founded on illusion; good Nurse Nature never lies. And precisely so, the wide-spread instinct which makes men pray, itself implies that there is a Being who receives the prayer and answers it back into the human breast.

When, however, the objection is raised to Prayer that it is incompatible with that vast fact known as "the Reign of Law," it becomes necessary to consider the objection very gravely.

Our belief in the Reign of Law is the grandest and most momentous of all the beliefs which modern science has established. It is the recognition of the sublime fact that order prevails throughout the universe. When I say that I believe in the Reign of Law, or in the universality of the Laws of Nature, I mean that I believe that the forces which act through the earth and the starry heavens always act in the like manner, and that under the like set of conditions the like results will always follow. This is only another way of saying that God's modes of action do not shift and change;

that his methods of work are so perfect as never to need altering. That being so, it would certainly be folly to expect that he would alter them in particular cases because we entreat him to do so. If that were indeed the case, awful would be the responsibility of any man who offered up any such entreaties. He would be setting his wisdom against God's, seeking to break the order that springs forth from the divine Will.

The sunshine and the rain, however, and all purely physical phenomena depend, under the Reign of Law, on purely physical conditions. And Prayer, which is a spiritual act, will not affect those physical conditions. And therefore all the prayers of all the world cannot make one drop of rain fall in all the year, or one ray of sunshine break through the clouds in all the centuries, beyond such as the physical conditions would bring about in natural course. And if the farmer sees signs of a soaking summer or of an approaching drought, his course is not to ask God to avert it, but to make the best provision he can against it. And so with all phenomena that are altogether physical: they are not to be prayed for or prayed against; such prayers are wasted forces issuing always either from sheer ignorance or

from the most overweening presumption. They may well be pardoned in a child or in the uncultured savage. In the ritual of a Christian Church they approach very near to blasphemy.

But the world in which we live is not physical alone, but spiritual also. And the spiritual side of it touches our life even yet more nearly than the physical. And prayer is a spiritual force, and may well work wonderful effects in the spiritual sphere. I do not doubt, indeed, that the Reign of Law is as real and as universal in matters spiritual as in matters physical, though we are not yet able to discern the laws so clearly. But then I find that this is itself one of the spiritual laws: that prayer for spiritual strength is followed by the acquisition of that strength. Great mischief arises from confounding the spiritual sphere and the physical sphere, and expecting results in one sphere to come promiscuously from the exercise of forces in the other. In the physical sphere, for example, the law of God is that the nearer a needle is brought to a magnet, the more powerfully does the magnet attract it; while in the spiritual sphere God's law is that the more earnestly the soul reaches up to God in prayer, the more surely does he make his strength to enter into it.

It would, however, be as foolish to expect to attract the needle by prayer as to attempt by the magnet to win the strength of God to the soul.

Thus the prayer of exceeding sorrow brings God's answer of comfort, the prayer of penitence brings the sweet sense of forgiveness, the prayer in temptation brings the strength to repel the evil,—and not one of these phenomena is a breach of the Reign of Law. Rather they are so many beautiful examples of it; as surely so as the fall of the rain-drops to the ground or the ebb and flow of the tides in harmony with the motion of the moon.

I will go further. I maintain that the Reign of Law, so far from being adverse to prayer, is a powerful reason for its cultivation. For if this sublime conception teaches us that it is vain to pray for good crops or great riches, since good crops or great riches can only result from their own proper and natural causes; it teaches us likewise that it is vain to look for saintly character or for the peace which passeth understanding from any other antecedents than *their* proper and natural cause; and this is the habit of prayer to God.

But it is only a narrow interpretation of the

word "Prayer" to confine it to the approach of the soul to God in petition or supplication. God is our Friend; and that would be poor friendship in which the intercourse was confined to asking on the one side and granting on the other. We love to commune with our friend. In the interval of leisure we gladly seek him out and talk with him. Our labour is sweetened if we can exchange a word with him now and again amid our toil. Converse with him is our delight, though it lead to nothing whatever beyond. And so it is in man's friendship with God. We love to commune with him. Waking to a new day, or laying ourselves down to sleep at night, it is delightful to turn our hearts to him and feel his touch upon our inward being. In the midst of our day's work it is sweet to lift up our souls to him and be assured of his presence with us strengthening our hands for duty.

Thanksgiving, confession, simple communion spirit with Spirit, these are as much part of the wonderful inward life of Prayer as the most earnest supplications. They are not only the supreme help, but the highest happiness of the best men; and so long as we do not find them entering into our daily life as a strength

and delight, we may know that we have not reached all to which God has appointed us here on earth and are not realising the best possibilities of human life.

If you have read thus far, you will ere this have perceived that in my view the utterance of prayer by the lips is by no means essential to its reality. Our speech with God is not by motions of the tongue and articulate syllables. It is the motion of the soul, of the inward Self, that reaches to God and brings the response from him. Nevertheless, the distinctness of our own thought and feeling may often be helped by the spoken words,—nay, the spoken words themselves may quicken the motion of the soul; and even the bending of the knees, the bowing of the head, the folding of the hands, and especially the closing of the eyes to

> Veil the earth's distracting sights,

may powerfully help the inward devotions. All these outward accessories—like all other religious ritual—are good and right just so far as they assist the devout movement of the inward spirit, and no further.

It is strange that it should ever be advanced as an objection to prayer that it is a waste of energy. Yet no criticism is more common.

It would be exactly as reasonable to allege that eating is a waste of energy. Just as the consumption and assimilation of our daily food is the condition of strength and health of body, so the spiritual exercise of prayer is the condition of strength and health of soul. And just as it is well to fix certain hours in the day which shall be set aside for eating, so it is well to fix times and seasons for devotion. He who thinks that any time will do for prayer, or that prayer should be left for the moments when the soul desires it, is apt to drop into the habit of giving it no time at all and to leave off desiring it ever. It is a custom good for us all in this difficult earthly life, wherein we so often go astray or fall, to begin and end each day with prayer. At the beginning we need all the strength which prayer can win for the duties that lie before us; at the end we have thanksgivings to pour out for all the good the day has brought us, contrition also, alas! too often to express for our lapses from the best, preparation, too, to make that we may "lay us down in peace and sleep."

I have spoken strongly of the deep delight of prayer. Do not be despondent if that delight in all its depth and fulness is given to

you only rarely. Persevere in prayer, though it should often seem as though God made little response. The effort towards God is often a hard effort for us here in the weakness and blindness of the flesh. God is our Friend; but he is a veiled Friend. It may be but now and again by flashes that you shall see him for many a year to come. Yet persevere, and you shall be at last of those "pure in heart" who "see God" in their daily vision.

When man rises to his best, his highest, his holiest, then his life becomes an unbroken prayer. It is all a turning of the face to God, and God meets the man and goes with him and sustains him through all trial. So was it with Jesus in those last great weeks. So shall it be with us, if not here and now, yet, let us hope, by and by in the unseen life when the flesh shall no more weigh us down.

Meanwhile, if at any time we are inclined to say that God does not hear us and that we cannot pray, let us read once again Archbishop Trench's sonnet:

> Not Thou from us, O Lord, but we
> Withdraw ourselves from Thee,
>
> When we are dark and dead,
> And Thou art covered with a cloud,
> Hanging before Thee, like a shroud,

So that our prayer can find no way,
Oh, teach us, that we do not say,
"Where is *thy* brightness fled?"

But that we search and try
What in ourselves has wrought this blame:
For Thou remainest still the same;
But earth's own vapours earth may fill
With darkness and thick clouds, while still
The sun is in the sky.

CHAPTER VI.

THE CAUSES OF DOUBT.

In the preceding chapters we have dwelt on the various modes in which God finds access to the mind of man and assures him of his presence. Through the witness of the understanding, the witness of conscience, and the witness of the spirit, God impresses himself on man's reason, his moral apprehension and his emotional sensibilities. All these avenues of witness are open even without an initial effort on the man's part to draw near to God. Further, when the man himself seeks God in prayer, such help and strength and comfort come to him in the strain and strife of life as are the best assurance that God is really there and heeds his cry. These things are the normal experience of the earnest heart, testified to by tens of thousands, not only now, but in the days of our fathers and in the old days before them.

But if this be so, it may well be asked, "How is it that other tens of thousands deny

that we have any certitude of God?" Why is it, indeed, that the words Atheist, Agnostic, Secularist, Positivist, have become so familiar in our ears, words each of which implies at the least ignorance of these various modes of divine witness, and ignorance of the God who utters his witness in our hearts?

The word Atheist itself is perhaps less common than it was a hundred years ago; but there are clever men still who make loud profession of their atheism,—which means on some lips the absolute denial of God, while on others it is simply a disclaimer of any conscious relation with God. As the term Atheist has receded, the word Agnostic has advanced; and it now has quite a fashionable savour, adopted as it is by leaders in polite literature and large numbers of those who frequent polite society. It is an emphatic profession of ignorance, the protestation of those who assume the epithet that they know nothing of the Supreme Power, whatever it be, and expect not to know anything. While so many cultivated men proclaim their agnosticism, their ruder brethren among the artisans prefer to describe themselves as Secularists; and they explain that they desire to confine their attention to the tangible business of life without

reference to God, and especially without reference to any further life beyond the grave; and their most influential leader claims that atheism is itself a necessary element of true secularism. Lastly, not a few of the most richly endowed intellectually—many of them also men of singular moral elevation—range themselves as Positivists. Some would convey by this term that they own discipleship to Auguste Comte, and hold with him that abstract humanity—the "Grand Being" constituted of all that has been good and noble in the men and women of the past, a Being always increasing as the generations rise and pass away—is the proper object of our worship and adoration, or, as Mr. Frederick Harrison prefers to say, our *cult*. Others, however, describe positivism simply as the exclusive acceptance of such truth as may be reasoned from the positive facts of human experience. In this sense, indeed, this present book is emphatically a "positivist" work, since its allegations are based solely on the facts of human experience. But the professed Positivist would certainly rule us out of court, since he is not convinced of the reality of the experience to which, in the previous chapters, all our appeal has been made.

All these groups then—and they are no mean part of the thinking world in our time—either distinctly reject or tacitly ignore or explain away as illusion the whole order of experiences which form the substance of this book so far. They do not acknowledge that any necessity of the understanding justifies us in affirming a living Cause behind all the motions of the universe. They do not admit that the facts of conscience imply a living Being as the source of moral obligation. They do not recognise in the waftings of peace or consolation to the soul any manifestation of a divine Visitant. They do not allow that the address of the human spirit to God in prayer wins any response out of the eternal silence. If the experiences on which we have hitherto dwelt are the natural and normal experiences of man, one would hardly expect this great body of protest. Can we discover any causes sufficient to account for all this doubt and disbelief? And if so, are any of these causes so peculiarly active in our own time as to account for any special aggressiveness of doubt and disbelief at the present day?

If we can find such causes, and if they are not themselves of a nature to invalidate the assurance of God which we draw from his

inward witness, then the fact that they have produced wide-spread doubt and disbelief need not disturb our own faith. Now we need not, I think, seek far to find such causes,—some of them acting all down the course of history, while others are peculiarly powerful in our own time. Let us examine first those causes of doubt and disbelief which are peculiarly powerful in our own time.

The intellectual conditions of our time largely account for, though they do not justify, the doubt and disbelief of which we have taken note. For a hundred years a great wave of scepticism—that is, of inquiry into the foundations of belief—has been passing over Western Europe. It has uprooted many a doctrine in politics and religion which had long been held unquestionably true, and it will uproot more yet before it shall subside. It has destroyed many false beliefs; and it has been no less dangerous to true beliefs when men rested them on false grounds. The belief in God and his close relations with our spirits has its real support in the spiritual experiences of men. But the claims of such experiences to be regarded as the true ground of religion had been ignored by Catholics and Protestants alike. Catholics had referred all men to the authority

of the Church, and Protestants had referred all men to the authority of the Bible or of the Creeds as the basis of belief in God and prayer. But the serious inquiries which have been carried on so actively during the last century, and the general sceptical temper which has accompanied them, soon persuaded large sections of the community that such authorities as these were of little avail as a basis for such tremendous conclusions; and because men had not been taught to seek the foundations of faith in their own hearts, faith was bereft of support and fell away. Moreover, the Churches had inculcated ideas of God which are *not* true. They had taught that he is a God of wrath, who must be appeased by some stupendous sacrifice, or they had taught that he would interfere with the great movements of Nature by "particular providences" to suit each man's particular needs. They had taught that he could be approached only through outward sacraments, or only through belief in the atoning blood of Christ. Men who had caught anything of the sceptical temper which was in many respects one of the best elements of the time, found it impossible to hold by such teaching any longer; and as no man spoke to them of the very different

God whom they might find by earnest reflection on their own inward lives, they were led, in rejecting the superstitions, to reject the idea of God altogether.

Or, again, the priests and the theologians had committed the fatal error of appealing chiefly to such exceptional occurrences, either real or imaginary, as wore the aspect of the miraculous, as proofs of the existence of a living Will endowed with control over the forces of Nature. They themselves scarcely discerned such a Will in the daily energies by which the sun rises and sets, and the nurturing rain falls upon the earth, and the flowers bloom, and the sweet fruit ripens. But the sceptical spirit made short work of the miraculous; and so, when that was gone, it seemed as if the manifestation of God was gone as well. And then, when wise and learned men began to talk so much about Laws of Nature, and to assure us that every drop of rain and every flake of snow, every grain of corn and every pebble on the beach, is the creature of Law uniform, certain, perpetual, maintaining that Law has sway absolutely and for ever in all the motions of the universe,—a very curious trick of the mind came in and told with immense effect against the recognition of the energy of God throughout

this region of beautiful and perfect order. So inevitable is it in the human mind to require Will as the cause of phenomena, and so closely did Law become associated in men's minds with all phenomena, that they unconsciously personified the Laws of Nature themselves, and began to rest content in the conception that these laws themselves are the *causes* of the phenomena. A Law is really merely the fact that certain phenomena always happen in a certain order. It is no more the cause of the phenomena than the fact that a regiment is marching in step is the cause of Private Atkins's making a particular stride. The phenomena themselves go to make up the Law; and if there were no phenomena there would be no Law. Nevertheless, the confusion prevails in tens of thousands of minds that Law is itself a cause. Law is practically personified in the thoughts of multitudes. And the result is that the natural sense of the need of God behind phenomena is dulled or altogether blotted out.

Moreover, while unfeignedly rejoicing in the astounding progress of physical science in our time and recognising its enormous value to the best life of mankind, we cannot help perceiving that, for the moment, it tells against the

natural trust of men in spiritual realities in other ways besides those to which I have already alluded. It is a common difficulty to the student in any of our higher schools or colleges that each professor is apt to insist on the paramount importance of his own subject, and to think very lightly of all the other subjects in the curriculum of study. With every intention of fairness and concession, the lecturer on mathematics thinks a couple of hours a week would be quite time enough for the student to devote to Latin, and the teacher of Greek cannot understand why one afternoon out of seven is not ample allowance for chemistry or physiology. This is only a familiar example of the fact that the human mind is capable of no more than a limited range of keen interest at any one time. We are all specialists in our way, and while our attention is fixed on one group of truths, the vast ranges of truth that lie all around and beyond are hardly recognised by our consciousness. Now multitudes of the best minds in Europe at the present day are engaged in the enthusiastic pursuit of physical science. This is their absorbing topic, and the range of fact outside this realm necessarily sinks for them to but secondary interest or loses all

interest whatever. Without in the least meaning to shut out any real knowledge from respectful treatment, and indeed insisting all the while in the most emphatic language on the sacred claims of all real knowledge to recognition, they nevertheless practically proclaim the sphere of their own studies to yield the only knowledge worthy of serious consideration. The current use of the word "Science" itself affords proof enough of this. The term properly covers, and was formerly used as covering, every species of demonstrated and systematised knowledge. But now it is used nine times out of ten to stand exclusively for those particular branches of such knowledge which deal with the physical constitution of the universe. If you said that some one is "a scientific man," you would at once be understood to mean that he handled the telescope or the microscope, the scales or the retort, the geologist's hammer or the knife of the dissecter. If it turned out that he was devoted, on the contrary, to tracing the laws of human consciousness, of our moral nature, or of our spiritual apprehension, it would be held that you had described him in a very misleading way.

But the preponderance of the pursuit of

physical science is unfavourable in other ways also to religious belief. That pursuit deals exclusively with what can be seen, touched, smelt, tasted, or in some fashion or other apprehended by one of the five senses. The most essential lesson which the physical student has to learn at the outset is that the evidence of the senses is to be for him the ultimate evidence. His facts, his laws are to be proved by physical testimony, testimony of which the eye or the hand can take cognisance. That an assurance is borne into his mind is a kind of evidence which he rightly and rigidly shuts out; if the scales or the retort or the microscope do not confirm the suggestion of his own mind, he is to reject it. That physical things are physically discerned is just as fundamental a maxim in physical science, as that spiritual things are spiritually discerned is in religion. But with this training, with these habits, who can wonder if the chemist or the physiologist, together with those who are strongly under his influence, is prejudiced at the outset against attaching their due weight to spiritual facts and the experiences of the soul in communion with its God?

Nor must it be forgotten that in many departments of physical science the student

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deals daily with substances of a perishable nature. The tissues of animals and plants decay and dissolve into their elements so surely and so rapidly that a man whose life is spent in their examination may very easily acquire a habit of mind which connects dissolution and death with all things. It becomes hard to him, therefore, to admit to his conception the permanence of spiritual facts or of spiritual beings. And if it be the tissues of the human body that constantly engage his thought and attention, it is doubly hard to him to look upon the spirit lodged in so evanescent a frame, as being akin to, or holding converse with, an infinite and eternal Being. The force of physiological preoccupation in undermining religious trust comes out strongly, I think, if we place side by side the great astronomers and the distinguished physiologists. The former are as perfectly drilled as the latter in the handling of scientific evidence. They also, in the last resort, appeal to the senses for the facts from which they reason. Their training tends no less strongly to cure them of jumping to conclusions or relying on fancy instead of observation. But the subjects of their observation are comparatively permanent, their dissolution being a matter not of hours or days, but of vast ages transcending our

imagination. And so, while physiology has given many an able champion to the agnostic side of religious controversy, the great names in astronomy, Kepler, Galileo, Newton, Herschel, stand pre-eminently for belief in Almighty God.

To point out that the preoccupation of our time with physical science has in some degree acted unfavourably on religious belief must not be construed into an attack upon scientific pursuits. Not only are the physicist and the biologist rendering enormous services to our material civilisation and endowing our race with vast stores of new and fascinating knowledge, but in their ultimate result their researches will tell in the most powerful manner for the renewal and confirmation of belief in God. They reveal to us marvels in the structure and development of the universe, which must in the end augment the reverence of man for the Eternal Power from whom the whole proceeds. All that I insist upon is this, that in the methods of study and habits of thought which have taken so strong and wide a hold of the educated mind of our time, there are elements which, for the moment, tend to the disparagement of spiritual philosophy and the distrust of spiritual experience.

Let us pass on now to a very different set of facts which tell against religious belief in our time.

The various modes in which God bears witness to himself in the human spirit all require for their full effect a certain repose on the part of the man. This is especially so with what I have called the witness of the spirit and with the witness through prayer. "*Be still* and know that I am God," is a maxim that goes down to the very roots of human nature. Where there is no stillness there is likely to be little knowledge of God.

But in our time stillness is being more and more thrust out of the lives of men. With railways, telegraphs and telephones, great cities and competitive commerce, the penetration of political and even philanthropic activity to classes which formerly took little part therein, the average life of Englishmen has come to be a very different affair from what it was fifty years ago. Even children live under high pressure. A most pathetic picture was that which was drawn by the pupil-teacher whom the inspector set to write an account of her day. She told how all time for devotion was squeezed out of her every-day life. I suppose that there are tens of thousands of men and women who

have left off the daily habit of saying their prayers, not deliberately or from any conscious scepticism, but because they are in such a hurry every morning, and so tired every night. And with the hurry there is worry. Turn over the pages of some old letter writer who lived before the inauguration of penny postage. How leisurely are the sentences, how deliberate the paragraphs! But three-fourths of the letters we receive now are hasty business notes, not a word wasted, not a syllable outside the immediate business purport. The brain of the modern man is working without ceasing on questions of business and affairs which leave little opportunity for the counsels of the Holy Spirit to steal upon him and possess him with their joy. Unless he have the wisdom to guard jealously from "the care of this world and the deceitfulness of riches," at least a few minutes every day, and dedicate them to the lifting up of his soul toward God, even the second-hand assurance of the presence and love of God which has come to him as an inheritance from parents who lived quieter days, is only too likely to slip from him altogether and leave him a prey to the spirit of utter unbelief.

But while the major part of the English people in the present generation are thus given

up to business cares to the darkening of their spiritual insight, a smaller number are drying up the fountains of spiritual life in a manner far less excusable, though perhaps even more injurious. Among the wealthier men and women of our time there are very many—and these too often young men in the first flush of manly vigour, or young women robed in the first grace of womanhood—whose lives are deliberately given over to the pursuit of pleasure, not as a recreation, but as the main purpose of life. Such persons pass lives of alternate feverish excitement and pitiable *ennui*, and in either frame of mind are little susceptible to the spiritual experiences which assure the soul of the near presence of its God. In simpler ages pleasure has been but the supplement to labour, the refreshment which renews the powers of mind and body for the work they are set to do. Pleasure thus sought and cherished in no way interferes with the natural intercourse between the human spirit and the divine. But permitted to cover the whole field of life, it darkens the heavens of God and spreads an impenetrable cloud between the source of the heavenly light and the consciousness of the poor votary of frivolity.

And, indeed, this dedication of life to mere

amusement without regard to the countless duties which every awakened conscience finds so urgent, is only one form of a great wrong which men have done themselves in all ages of the world by which they effectually bar off their spirits from the delights of the heavenly converse. At all times human sin has been the supreme obstacle to human faith.

No greater injustice can we do than to set down every man who rejects the faith in God as therefore a man of sin. We have seen that there are ample explanations at hand for the doubts entertained by many earnest men without recourse to any moral reproaches whatever. More unworthy still is the bigotry which assumes the displeasure of God against the disbeliever in this or that specific theological creed. Nevertheless, it remains one of the fundamental facts in the natural history of mankind that habitual transgression of the moral law is the most potent of all causes of unbelief in God.

We have dwelt at length on four methods of witness by which man comes to the sure knowledge of God, the witness of the understanding, the witness of conscience, the witness of the spirit, and the witness through prayer. If we take these one by one, it will be clear

to us how greatly the force of their united testimony must be weakened by an habitual disregard of the moral law.

This enfeeblement of the testimony is least marked in the case of the witness of the understanding. Here we can only say that a life of self-indulgence tends to relax the powers of precise thought and clear realisation, simple and manly living being among the most essential conditions of the sustained and vigorous exercise of the reasoning faculty.

But when we pass to the witness of conscience, the deteriorating influence of sinful habits becomes much more manifest. It is clear at the outset that conscience as the voice approving worthy action will be deprived of opportunity of coming into play in exact proportion to the neglect of worthy living. But the force of conscience in warning against the wrong or exhorting to the right is no less surely impaired. For this appeal to the inward ear is affected by the like conditions with signals addressed to the outward ear: habitual neglect of the appeal brings about unconsciousness that the appeal is ever made. If a bell be rung to rouse you every morning at six o'clock, and, for a few mornings running, instead of springing from your bed at the sound, you turn over and

go to sleep again, in a week you will probably be deaf to the sound altogether, and waking with a yawn at half-past eight you will protest that the bell was never rung at all. It is not that the bell is not rung exactly as it was before; it is that your auditory nerves have become incapable of conveying the sound to your consciousness. In the like manner he who "turns a deaf ear" to the solemn appeal of conscience will soon be but dimly conscious, if conscious at all, of its pleading. It is not that God will cease to plead, but that the moral nature has become insensible to the appeal. So also the sting of conscience rebuking for the wrong deed after its commission, loses its keenness under disregard, till the man may go on from sin to sin with long immunity from the anguish of remorse. This is itself the most terrible punishment of disobedience, degrading the soul from the prerogatives of humanity. Only in some awful conjuncture in which some new bounds of crime have been reached, will conscience reassume its sway with sudden and awful power, flashing upon the soul the reality of God not as a tender and protecting Spirit, but as the terrible God of chastisement.

I have been led, in the sentences above, to sketch the fearful effects in the paralysis of

conscience of living a life of manifest and flagrant wickedness. Thank God! the great criminals in the world are few, and the major part of the men and women whom we know are outwardly respectable, and conform to the laws of conduct laid down by society. But unhappily neither outward respectability nor conformity to social usages can be taken as evidence of a life really led under the daily guidance of a sensitive conscience. Men and women whom no one calls "wicked" may still be living entirely for selfish ends, without hunger or thirst after righteousness, without any devotion to what is pure and noble. In the degree in which we live so, conscience inevitably loses its keen edge, and we are bereft of the convincing testimony it bears to the reality and presence and urgency of God in our daily lives.

Turning now to that which I have called the witness of the spirit, the witness which, short of the perfect communion in prayer, brings man nearest to the heart of God and gives him most of the pure joy of religious faith, we observe that this too is, by its nature, open chiefly to those who are trying to live as God's children. It is true that it is given often to those who have for a while dropped away from the higher life and suffered themselves to be

tangled in the cares of the world; but it does not come to them if they are really indifferent to goodness and purity and heavenly-mindedness. It supervenes only on their discontent with their own short-comings, their longing to get away from their own earthiness. The man who has no haunting sense that surely there is a nobler life possible for him than that of worry and vexation and ill-temper, is not the subject to whom God is thus revealed in the pure beauty of his holiness. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." And to men content to be impure, with no yearnings for better things, the beatific vision is not given.

As for the witness through prayer, it is clear that that can be only for those who pray. But as self-indulgence eats into the heart of a man, even if by olden custom he still utters the words of prayer, he leaves off praying; for the two habits—self-indulgence and prayer—cannot dwell side by side in the human soul.

Thus we have found many explanations of the doubt and the unbelief so widely spread in the world. There are obvious causes for this sad phenomenon—causes intellectual and moral, temporary and persistent. But none of them invalidate the testimony to God implanted in

the soul of man. That remains unimpaired through all. Indeed, when we glance back and reckon up how much there is in the mind and life of man to make against religious faith, our astonishment will be that the belief in God remains so deep and strong, shaping, inspiring, and blessing the lives of myriads of his children. Firm in the rock of eternal truth must the foundations of our belief be laid, since all these winds and waves cannot prevail against it.

CHAPTER VII.

THE LIMITS OF KNOWLEDGE.

"Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?" So speaks Zophar to Job in the grand old drama; or, as some would have us render the original Hebrew, "Canst thou find out the depth of God? Canst thou find out the end of the Almighty?"

It is a tremendous question. We have traced certain sure lines of knowledge of God on the part of man. Nothing can obliterate these. But "the depth of God" and "the end of the Almighty," these certainly no man can "find out." There have been Christian preachers who have been so impressed with the unsearchable mysteries of this divine power pressing us all around that they have taken their stand as "Christian Agnostics," men following Christ indeed and accepting his teaching, but proclaiming that outside the specific revelation which they believe the Christian Gospel to give, it is utterly impossible for us to have

any real knowledge of God. The position taken up in our previous chapters is a very different one from that of the Christian Agnostic; but we cannot wonder that to some it should seem that what we do not know of God wholly overshadows what we do know, that our immense ignorance swallows up our little knowledge. Our knowledge is, indeed, real knowledge; but it is knowledge only of the beginning of the Almighty, not of the end, of the manifestations of God with which our spirits come into direct contact, not of the profound and distant depths.

In fact, however clearly shine these points of knowledge, however luminous they are to us, however sufficient to light us on our way, they are but scintillating points, behind which no faculties of ours enable us to penetrate to the unmeasured mysteries of the eternal Being. Of the inward essence of that Power manifested to us in the motions of the universe, in the imperious behests of conscience, in the visitings of the spirit, in the communion of prayer, we know nothing. Of what God is in himself, independently of his communications to our own consciousness, our ignorance is impenetrable and absolute.

To confess so much seems to some men to be

giving up the whole battle and leaving the victory to the atheist. Yet it does not really weaken the citadel of faith in God in the least degree. Our knowledge of God is exactly parallel with our knowledge of all other objects of human apprehension whatsoever. We know him in those relations in which he affects our own consciousness; and that is all.

It is only in this fashion that we know any object of human apprehension whatsoever. Let us take some universally recognised department of human knowledge, and consider. How is it in geology, the science of this earth to the solid surface of which all of us are bound? Here is a piece of stone. We can tell that it is heavy, because it affects our muscles when we lift it, and we can measure its heaviness in proportion to other pieces of stone. That is called weighing. We can tell that it is hard by the pressure on our hand. We can tell that it is black, because it affects our sight with a sense of blackness. We can tell that it has but little taste and no perceptible smell by putting it to our tongue and our nose. But all that is only saying that *we* are made conscious of certain sensations when we come in contact with the stone; so far we have not learnt anything whatever about what the stone

is itself, only about what it makes us feel. Suppose there were in this whole universe no eyes to see, no tongues to taste, no hands or muscles to be sensitive to texture and to weight: what would the stone be then? Cut off these qualities which we only know as expressing the stone's relations to us, and what is it behind all these? What man can tell?

The geologist, it is true, can tell us something more. He can tell us how the stone came to be a stone. He tells us perhaps that this was once molten lava and was thrown from a volcanic crater and flowed down the mountain side before it cooled and hardened. Yes; but what *is* the stone and what *was* the lava?

The geologist turns to the chemist for an answer, and the chemist enumerates the elements into which the lava and the stone may be sundered by his wonderful art. But after all what *are* these elements? The chemists assure us that iron is an ultimate element, that they cannot sever it into different constituents. Well, be it so. But what is iron, or carbon, or hydrogen, or arsenic? I know you can describe it so far as to tell me just how it will affect my various senses or what effect it will have on my constitution if I imbibe it. But you cannot

tell me what it is in itself. You cannot make the faintest conjecture; and no man can.

Thus the case is the same with the commonest pebble on the road as it is with God. We know it in its relation to our own consciousness, but its inward nature, its unseen essence, is to us a secret absolute and unsearchable. Yet no one complains that we know nothing about the stone. We are much more apt to go to the other extreme and declare that we "know all about it." Both extremes are alike untrue. We know something about the stone and we know something about God. But neither in earth nor in heaven is there any object which we "know all about." Our knowledge is on the outside only. The inward secrets are impenetrable. Let us always bear in mind those profound lines of Tennyson:

> Flower in the crannied wall,
> I pluck you out of the crannies;—
> Hold you here, root and all, in my hand,
> Little flower—but if I could understand
> What you are, root and all, and all in all,
> I should know what God and man is.

When we pass up from the knowledge which we have of inanimate objects to that knowledge with which we know one another, the similarity of this knowledge, both in its extent and in its limitations, to our knowledge of God is very

striking. What real knowledge have I of my friend? I am not now speaking of the outward man, but of the inward; not of the face and voice, but of the spirit. All the immediate knowledge I have of him is knowledge of the way in which he affects my own consciousness. I know that his presence makes me glad. I know how often he has comforted me in trouble, cheered me in depression, helped me in difficulty, penetrated me with the sense of his sympathy in my joy and in my sorrow. I know what varied thoughts have been conjured up in my mind by his conversation. My whole life has been enriched by the impressions which he has made on my consciousness. He has quickened my understanding, my conscience, my emotions; and I love him well. But my very belief that he exists is nothing more than an inference from the effect of him on my consciousness. If any man say, "your friend *is not;* your belief in him is a mere illusion of your mind," I have no possible demonstration to offer that my friend *is*, or that the belief rests not on illusion, but on fact. Yet I believe in his existence absolutely, and no man can make me doubt.

Nay, I can go much further than believing that he is. I know not only *that* he is, but

what he is. Because I have felt the stimulus of his strong intellect, I know that he is wise. Because I have felt the elevation of his character, I know that he is good. Because I have felt the delight of his friendship, I know that he is loving. These are mere inferences, if you will. You may say that they do not amount to knowledge, that they are only my belief. But the fulness of my assurance amounts to real knowledge, none the less. I declare to you that "I am as sure of his good faith as I am of my own existence." And if some one tells me that he has been false or cruel, I *know* that it is not true.

Now all this is parallel with our knowledge of God word by word, and line by line. If we really know our friend, we really know God. If my assurance of God and his holiness may be an illusion, so may my assurance of my friend and his goodness. All my immediate knowledge of God, it is true, is knowledge of the way in which he affects my own consciousness, and my conviction that he *is* can be no more than an inference from his communication of himself to me. If you say, "God *is not*," I can prove nothing to you save by appeals to the like experiences in your own inward life of understanding, or

conscience, or emotion. And my convictions of the righteousness and loving-kindness of God come to me from my knowledge of him in my own life,—confirmed, indeed, by the testimony of thousands more and by my reading of human history, but still never to be done away though thousands assured me that they found no goodness in him and though history presented to me an insoluble enigma.

But Man's Knowledge of God is often questioned from another point of view than that with which we have so far dealt. It is said that in speaking of Intelligence, Goodness, Love as attributes of God, we are guilty of thinking of God in the image of man, or, to use the philosophical term, guilty of *anthropomorphism*. Now I believe that it is quite true that, in a certain measure, men always have thought of God and always must think of him in the image of man. We are men, and our language and our thought must be the language and the thought of men. We cannot get outside ourselves. We are anthropomorphic in speaking and thinking of the creatures below us also; and I do not doubt that this introduces a certain amount of error into our conception of the lives and inward being of cats and dogs, horses and lions. We ascribe to them,

probably enough, a wider range of consciousness than they really possess. And so also in thinking of God, we—ourselves so limited—cannot but conceive of his consciousness as having limits which do not really belong to it. If it were possible for it for one moment to be revealed to us what the inward nature of the God-life is, "consciousness" itself would, I make no doubt, be felt to be a word hopelessly inadequate by which to speak of it. But for all that, the words belonging to our human life, Consciousness, Intelligence, Will, Righteousness, Love, may be perfectly true as applied to God, *as far as they go.* They may give the best account *possible to us* of what God is. It may give a far truer impression to say that God has Intelligence, Will, Righteousness, Love, than to say that he has not, *or even to decline to say anything at all.* These assertions may all go in the right direction, even though to reach the inward reality of God they would have to be extended far beyond our poor powers of thought or speech.

Since, then, the earlier part of this little book has been occupied with maintaining our real knowledge of God, let us consider what limitations of our knowledge are involved when we speak of Intelligence or Will, of Goodness

or of Love as belonging to the divine nature.

Intelligence, as we know it among ourselves, is a faculty which is engaged in mastering difficult knowledge by slow degrees and acquiring wisdom by life-long labour. But the effort and the labour do not themselves belong to the essence of Intelligence. They come from the fact that our intelligence is *so small*. Intelligence in itself—unlimited in degree—would "know the end from the beginning" and embrace at all times perfect knowledge of all that is. Again, Will, with us, is a faculty in conflict always with obstacles, and the idea of striving against difficulties great or small springs up in our mind at the very sound of the word. But the obstacles, and the striving, and the difficulties do not belong to Will, but come only from its feebleness, its limitations of power. Will in its own essence only needs to be expanded to a sufficient power in order to coalesce with the complete accomplishment of all that is willed. Then, once more, Righteousness to us means the steadfast resistance of temptation, the constant preference of the noble motive to the ignoble. But temptations and ignoble motives are no part of the essence of Righteousness; and in one elevated above all temptation and untouched by ignoble motives,

Righteousness would be merged in that other mode of being which we try to bring before our minds when we speak of Holiness. Love, too, with us is so closely, so inseparably, associated with longing desire, or keen disappointment, or impassioned delight in the realisation of its yearnings, that we find it hard to dissever it in our minds from these vehement emotions. But none of these are any essential part of Love itself. Love may from first to last be in absolute possession of all it loves; and in that case it will have in it a sublime and eternal calm beyond the powers of man to conceive.

When, therefore, we use the words belonging to these human faculties and emotions in reference to God, we must remember always that they can only rightly be so used if freed from all the limitations involved in the conditions of human life. And after that, we must remember also that still we do but approach the wonderful truth; that it is only the reaching down of the great God towards us that we can in any wise understand.

We shall, I think, do well to glance for a moment here at the dispute which we hear so often whether God is *personal* or not. Is God *a Person?* It is considered by many

that this question touches the real dividing line between the religious and the irreligious, between the "believer" and the "unbeliever," between the Theist and the Atheist. There are good Christians who hold that if a man answers "*No*" to the question, "Do you believe in a personal God?" he puts himself outside the pale of religious men. And, on the other hand, there are able philosophers who hold that if a man answers "*Yes*," he puts himself almost outside the pale of rational men. And, indeed, the question is as grave as any that can be set to us in philosophy or in religion.

Yet the difference between the men who answer, "Yes," and the men who answer, "No," is often not so great as you would think. Sometimes there is hardly any difference at all between them. For the answer often depends mainly on *what you mean* by "personal." The man who says "Yes," and would think it dreadful to say "No," means one thing; and the man who says "No," and would think it childish to say "Yes," means quite another thing.

When we speak of a "person," no doubt we usually mean a being in whom Intelligence and Will, Righteousness and Love, are all

limited in the manner of which we took note just now, a being, moreover, who is limited every way, whose powers of every kind and in every direction are set within narrow bounds. For we are usually speaking simply of a man or a woman or a child; and the faculties of every human being everywhere *are* limited. Even Hercules could not lift a mountain. Even Alexander could not conquer more than a single world. Even Shakespeare could not paint great pictures or compose great oratorios in addition to writing immortal plays. And it is quite true, too, that the word "person," which first of all stood for a Roman actor speaking his part through the stage-mask which he wore, originally signified a being limited to a particular character or part. Now, *if* when you ask me whether I believe in a "personal" God, I understand you to mean a God limited like Hercules, or Alexander, or Shakespeare, or, indeed, having any limits whatever conceivable by me, I shall certainly answer "No;" nor will you think me any the less religious for my answer. Indeed, to the question put *in that sense*, "No" is the only answer that any man really believing in God can possibly give.

But then, for my part, I doubt very much whether most people, when they use the word

"person," are thinking of the limitations at all. What they are thinking of is that mysterious inward self which exists in every man,—that self of which we spoke at length in the first chapter of this book, the unseen conscious power by which a man differs from a stone and from a tree, that inward Ego which belongs to everyone of us. And he who speaks of God as "Person" means that it is not the stone or the tree that is truly akin to God, but the Man, in whom wells up so wonderfully that conscious self-hood. And whatever else God be, our knowledge of him in all our communion with him, is the knowledge of a Self. Now, if *that* is what is meant by "Person," then the God we know is personal.

In any case, if a religious man denies the personality of God, it is that he holds God to be *above* Person, not *below*, *more* than Person, not *less*.

I have headed this chapter "The Limits of Knowledge;" and I cannot close it without protesting against pretending to know about God that which we do not and cannot really know. While the tribes and nations of men were yet in childhood it was natural enough, indeed, that they should take much to be real knowledge

of God which was only childish fancy; and if they were true to the best thoughts they had, we cannot blame them. It is in this way that we must look at the many superstitions of ancient peoples struggling towards the better knowledge which only their children's children could really reach. I am not sure but even that old prophet who declared that God had made man in his own image, "in the image of God created he him," fancied God to have the outward parts of a man, body and head and limbs, and would have protested against the purely spiritual meaning which we assign to his beautiful saying. And certainly there are statements concerning God put forward in the Bible which we cannot take for true knowledge, though other statements before and after are the very truest we can think or conceive. But the protest I wish to make is not against these natural, simple-hearted, sincere endeavours towards the full and glorious knowledge. My protest is against the confident assertions of educated theologians with regard to the inward nature of God, the "economy of the Godhead," as the phrase is. To take one of the worst cases, and one only, all those who profess what is called the Athanasian Creed, declare that there is "one God in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity,

. . . . for there is one person of the Father, another of the Son, and another of the Holy Ghost; but the Godhead of the Father, of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost, is all one, the glory equal, the majesty co-eternal. Such as the Father is, such is the Son, and such is the Holy Ghost; the Father uncreate, the Son uncreate, and the Holy Ghost uncreate; . . . . . and in this Trinity none is afore or after other, none is greater, or less than another,"—and so forth. Now the evil of all this is not so much that it is difficult to be understood or that to plain people one statement seems to contradict another, as that the statements, true or false, are such as no man can really *know*. No human experience, however profound, no human communion with God, however rich and sacred, can make men know such things as these. And confident statements concerning God which pretend to define his inward relations take away from the reality of religion. It is in his relation *to us* that we know God. His inward essence is veiled in awful mystery; and the pretence to diminish or explain the mystery injures the reverence of religion and of worship.

For my part, it is the actual experiences of men which I take to be the real foundations

of our knowledge of God; and reasonings dealing with terms which it is hard to understand seem to me seldom to lead us to further knowledge which is certain, and often to obscure and confuse the knowledge which comes to us direct. If I must put this feeling of mine into philosophical language, I shall have to say that I believe that a scientific theology is reached rather by the *positive* than by the *metaphysical* method.

While we are dealing with the limits of our knowledge of God, we must put in a word in reply to those who affirm that *knowledge* is a wrong word to use at all in this connection. Many deeply religious men affirm that our convictions concerning God are not properly called "Knowledge," but rather "Faith." "Faith" is indeed a beautiful word and stands for a beautiful attitude of soul. It is often used to signify belief which is held on the authority of the Church or the Bible or some individual teacher. Its true meaning is rather trust in the higher intimations that come to us in communion with God. And so all our belief in God derived from spiritual experience is Faith. But I must maintain that it is "Knowledge" too in the strictest signification of that word. Knowledge means assurance

that has been *thoroughly tested.* Newton's assurance of the truth of the great theory of gravitation was not knowledge when it was first borne in upon his mind. It was not knowledge even when he had worked it out and satisfied himself that it corresponded with a few facts in nature. But when he found fact after fact to correspond with it till experience reiterated again and again assured him that he could never come upon a fact that should not correspond with it, then his assurance became *knowledge.* And that assurance now stands firm as part of the admitted knowledge of the civilised world. In like manner, the first time that a child hears the voice of God in conscience, or a young man feels the delight of divine communion, perhaps it would be hardly accurate in strictness of speech to call his assurance of God "Knowledge." But as the reiterated experience of life confirms his first apprehension from day to day and from year to year, as in crisis after crisis he finds his faith tells true, as God becomes an intimate fact of his consciousness, and his conviction is only confirmed by every test, the assurance solidifies into strict and certain knowledge in precisely the same sense as our knowledge of the truths of any natural science that is built up on myriads of

successive experiments.

And so that olden writer was holding up no mere unattainable ideal to the young man, but that which everyone of us may reach and possess for ever, who wrote:—

My son, if thou wilt receive my words,
And lay up my commandments with thee;
So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom,
And apply thy heart to understanding;
Yea, if thou cry after discernment,
And lift up thy voice for understanding;
If thou seek her as silver,
And search for her as for hid treasures;
Then shalt thou understand the fear of the Lord,
And *find the knowledge of God.*

CHAPTER VIII.

THE PLACE OF THE PROPHET.

If what has been written thus far in this little book is true, then Man's Knowledge of God is knowledge which each man receives immediately from God himself. God pours the light of truth into the human mind with as direct a ray as that by which the light of the sun enters the human eye. The sun may shine more brightly on the shores of the Galilean lake than on the English town in which you live, shrouded by fog or smoke. And so one dwelling in that far country may see all the way from the Jordan Valley on the East to the Western Sea, or descry the snowy peak of Hermon glistening fifty miles to the North of the spot on which he stands, while you, in the sombre November atmosphere of Liverpool or London, cannot see across the Mersey or the Thames. But his sight there is of no avail to you here. You cannot see with his light, but only with your own; and until the mists lift up, and the

bright sun shines in all its glory on you too, your view will be circumscribed and your vision dull.

And so is it also with the spiritual light. Into some hearts the celestial ray seems to stream with ineffable glory, and theirs is the beatific vision of God which fills the soul with joy. Others see only "as in a glass darkly;" their glimpses of God are "broken lights," and times come to them when his face is well-nigh hidden.

Are we to say then that in knowledge of God one man can never help another? Are none to be masters and none disciples? Are there no teachers and learners in religion?

In all other branches of human knowledge one man becomes the pupil of another and profits by his superior efficiency. The mathematician imparts to others the knowledge of geometry. The Frenchman or the German instructs the Englishman in his native tongue. The great painter teaches the elements of his wonderful art to his scholars. The great musician trains the voices or the fingers of others to produce melodious sound.

And there is teaching in religion too; only, like all the deepest teaching, it is not the imparting of knowledge from without, but the

quickening of the knowledge which is within. The knowledge of God which the disciple may gain from the master is a knowledge of which the elements were there within him all the while. It is true that it is by the light which comes from God to his own spiritual eye that the learner learns to see God; but the teacher may help him to realise what he sees and to reduce it to clear knowledge instead of vague impressions. Or, to illustrate perhaps more precisely what takes place, the teacher helps him to hear more distinctly what it is that the voice of God is speaking to him inwardly.

Imagine yourself in some vast and noble church, seated in a far corner to which the preacher's words seem only to reach in faint and uncertain sound. But by your side sits one who is a near friend of the great preacher and knows well every intonation of his voice,—one also, let us suppose, whose hearing is keener than your own. You can just make out that there is some phrase which the preacher utters many times. Now and again you seem to catch a syllable. But what the phrase is you are at a loss to tell. You turn to your neighbour to ask what this is which the preacher says; and he whispers in your

ear: "The text the preacher repeats so often is 'God is Love.'" And after that you hear it too. You wonder how you could miss it so often. Yes, it comes to you again and again in varied intonation from the great preacher's lips, "God is Love." All you needed was the clue; and now that it has once been *suggested* to you, you also hear it clearly for yourself and know that that is what the preacher says.

So is it also with the word that comes from God, that Eternal Preacher of righteousness and truth, to the spirit of man. Many of us are very dull in our inward spirit. Our ears are stopped, so to speak, with the vanities of the world; or we are not naturally quick in spiritual apprehension. Our knowledge of God would be meagre indeed if we were left to ourselves. But there are men wiser and holier than we about us, or wiser and holier men speak with us through books which they have left a precious legacy to the world. These men allege the sublime truths which God has spoken to *them*. They have heard these things clearly, and they put them in glowing and incisive words. Then when these words—echoes of the divine voice—fall upon our ears, we know that even this is what God speaks to

us; and by the help of the suggestion thus made to us by our human brother, we are able at last to apprehend the inward speech by which the Heavenly Father speaks even to us as well.

Such men, helpers of their fellows, men walking more closely with God than the rest, there have been in all times and in all countries. It is through them that the religious beliefs of the masses of men have grown purer and more spiritual from age to age. They have heard so clearly the deliverances of the Holy Spirit that they have been able to perceive that some parts of what was commonly received by their generation as true religion was really no part of the true word of God. Then they have declared these great convictions of theirs. They have exposed the grossness of some of the accepted superstitions. They have proclaimed the higher and purer truth which God has uttered in their souls. And, though it has often seemed that their voice was but the voice of men crying in the wilderness, yet there have always been some whose own hearts and consciences have responded to their preaching, and who have recognised by the inward witness of their own spirits the divine reality of the eternal

truths thus uttered. And so by slow, but sure degrees, the world has gone on from truth to truth, putting away the superstitions that have held it in bondage and advancing to purer conceptions of God and Righteousness.

I say that such men there have been in all times and in all countries. But here and there in the world, and now and then in the centuries, such men have attained so rare a clearness of spiritual insight, and have been possessed by so passionate an ardour to declare to their fellows the great truths revealed to their own spirits, that they have stood out from ordinary preachers and teachers and seemed as though endowed with faculties of another order than those of other men. Such men are called Prophets, and the study of them and of their words and lives is the study of the great landmarks in the history of the religion of mankind.

Of these Prophets again some have been so transcendently great, their insight has been so piercing, their word so burning, their influence so effectual, their spiritual stature has towered so grandly above that of their contemporaries and countrymen, that in the broad history of the world they are counted as actual founders of religions. The faith that has been kindled

by their preaching in the breasts of others has been regarded as a new religion, beginning with them; and, for ever after, those churches or tribes or nations which have accepted their teachings have maintained that their life and preaching was the turning-point in the history of the world, and that to them for the first time God freely communicated holy secrets which had been concealed from all men until their day. And when a church or a nation looks upon a particular Prophet in this light, then it often seems to them that to compare any other whatever with him, or to see any limitations in his teachings, or to suppose that men can ever attain still clearer light on any part of divine truth than he attained is a sad infidelity or even a horrible blasphemy. It is in this manner that the Parsees, with their deep spiritual faith which symbolises the holy spirit of God by light or fire, have looked on Zoroaster or Zarathustra, that mighty old-world prophet, whose word comes dimly down to us from the hoary antiquity of Central Asia. It is after this fashion that the Buddhists of Ceylon, Nepaul, Thibet, China, and other oriental lands cherish the memory of Gautama, the noble and devoted Bengali prince, whose memory you also will learn to venerate if you read Mr. Edwin

Arnold's wonderful, fascinating poem, "The Light of Asia." It is thus also that the Mohammedans of India, of Arabia, and of other portions of the globe regard that strange, enthusiastic, bewildering prophet, Mohammed, the camel-driver. And in a similar way the Jews, scattered over the eastern and western worlds, look back upon the heroic figure of Moses who brought the Ten Words of God down from the rocky heights of Horeb, though they associate with him venerable patriarchs who lived before him and a noble line of prophets who lived after him. And lastly it is in this light that Christendom for eighteen hundred years has looked upon Jesus, of Nazareth, that Son of Man who gave us the Beatitudes and the Parables; indeed, the Christian world has almost unanimously gone further still and declared that this was not merely a prophet to whom was given in full measure the infallible word of God, but the very God himself taking upon him the flesh of man.

Of each of these mighty men it is alleged that he is the Founder of a New Religion. But they who have perceived what Religion truly is are unable ever to call Religion new. Religion is that sense of dependence on One

higher and better than himself which stirs strong emotion in the heart of man. From the first till now there has been but one religion, — one religion growing slowly purer, sweeter, stronger as the generations have risen and passed away, one religion under a thousand different forms of creed and worship, yet ever in essence compacted of the same elements of awe deepening into reverence, and vague desire refined and strengthened in the course of ages into the mighty love with which the best and holiest cleave to the unseen God. And so when we look closely into the work which the supreme prophets of the human race have achieved, we find that, though they may have delivered to their disciples many ideas that were really new to men, and greatly enlarged the current conceptions of God, and weaned their followers from many gross superstitions, not one of them can be said to have introduced a new religion. They have appealed to what already lay in the hearts of men only covered up and hidden by untrue doctrines or unholy modes of life. They have scattered these encumbrances like chaff before the winnowing fan by the glorious power of their word. They have taught men to listen to and to trust in the eternal speech of God within their own breasts. And so

they have lifted up religion into new health and strength and drawn the peoples to a more living consciousness of their kinship with the Holy Spirit who speaks to them his divine commandment by the voice of conscience, awakens in them the sense of his supreme presence under starry heavens or in the time of surpassing sorrow, or responds with such renovating power to the cry or the whisper of their prayers.

Though no civilisation has ever been wholly without men of the prophetic stamp, yet, I suppose, no reader of this book is likely to differ from me when I say that the sons of Israel have risen higher than any other race in this regard. As the Greeks stand out pre-eminent in history for philosophic power, or the Romans for mastery of the principles of law, so the Israelites excelled in that depth and strength of religious impression which goes to make the prophet. At any rate there is no *group* of prophets known to us through the literature of mankind so remarkable as those whose names illuminate the history of Israel from the eighth century before Christ downwards to the period of the captivity under the lords of Babylon. Amos, Hosea, Micah and Isaiah, Jeremiah and that glorious nameless

one whose writings are joined in our Bibles with those of Isaiah (running from the famous fortieth chapter to the sixty-sixth,)—these and others like them declared with extraordinary power the word which the God of Righteousness impressed upon their own souls. It is true, they mingled this with much other matter; they brought forth in one mighty stream the sublimest utterances of eternal truth with opinions about passing events, political counsels, and bold predictions of the disaster that must attend disobedience to God or the rewards that would surely ensue upon obedience. Later readers have both misunderstood the references to passing events and taken the predictions to be divinely guided forecasts which, if they have not been fulfilled yet, still will be some day. We must avoid such mistakes as this, for the prophets differed from other men not by any mysterious foreknowledge of the future, but simply by the intensity of their moral and spiritual impressions and the dauntless courage and devotion with which they proclaimed these to kings and people. It is in this that their value lies for men of all times and nations. Whether they were right or wrong in any particular expectations which they entertained, whether their advice was

always statesmanlike or not—and, for my part, I think it generally was so in the best sense of the word—they have left utterances behind them which rise to the very highest level of ethical and religious inspiration. Who is not grateful to the men who, amid the superstitions and idolatries, the perils and strife, of those hapless times, could utter such imperishable words as these,—"What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God"? or "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength;" or "Rend your heart, and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord, your God: for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness;" or "Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord? or who shall stand in his holy place? He that hath clean hands and a pure heart; who hath not lifted up his soul unto vanity, nor sworn deceitfully;" or "I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones;" or "To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word"? We may truly say of this marvellous line of teachers that the eye of

their faith never dimmed and their voice never faltered in declaring the word of their God.

But it is of the utmost importance to observe that these utterances and the like had power in the day they were spoken, and have power over us now, solely because they appeal to what men feel in their own hearts to be true the moment it is explicitly declared. "He hath *showed thee*, O man, what is good," says Micah, when he proclaims what the Lord requires. Yes, God has showed us, and has never left himself without witness in the hearts even of common men and women; and it is on that fact alone that the prophet's power is based. It is because we feel what he says to be true that he sways us. Whatever authority he possesses is not from credentials of any miracles or any predictions fulfilled, but wholly from his power of piercing through to our own most inward consciousness and enabling us—even compelling us—to recognise and realise what God himself is showing *to us as surely as to him*.

If once we view the prophet in this light, we shall well know how to test any man who may come to us in the name of a prophet. Does what he says find a response in our own conscience and inward spirit? If so, he

is in his measure a prophet indeed, and we shall do well to sit at his feet and hear his words. His office is to quicken our own inward life, to turn us in upon ourselves that we may hear and know what the Holy Spirit utters in the silence of our own souls. But if his words do not touch us inwardly, if we cannot feel that he is really God's interpreter, then for us at least he can be no prophet, though tens of thousands give him heed. There is no ultimate authority in religion save the authority of God in us; and the only true spiritual authority wielded by men is that which belongs to them so far as they make clearer and stronger in us God's own teaching. Nor is there any other kind of inspiration in religion accorded to any son of man than that same speaking of God to his secret soul, which we also may hear in the witness of conscience, the witness of the spirit, and the wonderful communion of our prayer.

And of all men who have enjoyed this divine inspiration, of all men who have wielded this true spiritual authority, of all men who have been to great multitudes prophets of the most high God, none other seems to me to have been the equal of him who said—"Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God,"

and laying his gentle hand on the little innocent head, bade men suffer the little children to come unto him, for of such was the kingdom of heaven.

But the power of Jesus to-day and of every other ancient prophet whose words stir our hearts within us rests on the fact that as God spoke to them of old so also does he speak to us of this latter time.

That true poet of the western world and the modern time, Mr. J. R. Lowell, sings :—

God is not dumb, that He should speak no more:
If thou hast wanderings in the wilderness
And find'st not Sinai, 'tis thy soul is poor;
There towers the mountain of the voice no less,
Which whoso seeks shall find; but he who bends
Intent on manna still, and mortal ends,
Sees it not, neither hears its thunder'd lore.

Slowly the Bible of the race is writ,
And not on paper leaves, nor leaves of stone;
Each age, each kindred, adds a verse to it,
Texts of despair or hope, of joy or moan.
While swings the sea, while mists the mountains shroud,
While thunder's surges burst on cliffs of cloud,
Still at the prophets' feet the nations sit.

CHAPTER IX.

A LAST WORD.

Those readers who have read the preceding pages will perhaps have discovered that, in discussing Man's Knowledge of God, I have discussed all that seems to me fundamental in religion. This sense of the divine presence and this conscious communion with God seem to me to be the sum and substance of all the highest and purest religion and of Christian religion in particular. Such seems to me to be exactly the religion which Jesus taught, and just what he longed that all the world should feel. Thus, for my part, I should have no inclination to press upon religious inquirers any elaborate system of doctrine outside this simple Knowledge of God. And so all the great words of Christian doctrine, around which the warfare of the Churches has raged, seem to me to fall into their true place at once as they are related to this one supreme faith. Salvation, for example, I take to be

simply the winning of a human soul into this happy and beautiful Knowledge of God. Heaven I take to be such a life as they enjoy in whom this knowledge is fullest and deepest; Hell, the life of those who stand in outer darkness, rebels against conscience and unblessed by any divine communion. Forgiveness is the passing away of the clouds that hide God from the heart. Faith, by which we are saved indeed, is loyalty to the utterances of the divine voice in the soul. Revelation is the unveiling of the knowledge to those who were blind to it, and Inspiration is the inbreathing of that spirit into a man's soul by which he is made quick and strong to apprehend the truth.

Now, before I end this book, I should like to point out, in a few sentences, how these views of religion must affect our views of our fellow-men and of the life which we all are set to lead.

It is one of the saddest things in all the world that religion, instead of uniting men together, seems to do more than any other cause to hold them apart. Christian people are divided into scores of different sects, each with its own particular view upon some point of doctrine, or of ritual, or of church government

And these differences are commonly thought so important that they practically destroy the warm sympathy which you would naturally expect to exist among all those who love God and long to obey him and delight to draw nigh to him in prayer. Between Ritualist and Calvinist, Catholic and Protestant, Christian and Jew, there is coldness, or even hostility, quite as often as sympathetic regard. We are so used to this that we take it almost as a matter of course. Yet how profoundly sad it is, and what strange fruit for religion to bear is this antagonism!

For my own part, I apprehend that we must long continue to have our separate worshipping societies. The man, for instance, who believes that Jesus was no other than God himself and so loves to offer his prayer to him can hardly join in worship with one to whom, because he believes that the Father is God alone, the offering of prayer to Jesus seems an idolatry. Nor can he to whom no act of public worship seems worthy in which there is not a ritual rich with gorgeous symbolism well attend the same church with him to whom such ritual seems to be a theatrical display destroying the simplicity of man's communion with his God. So that I believe that we shall

long continue to fall into separate groups according to our special theological or ecclesiastical ideas. But there is no reason in the nature of things why this should injure our mutual respect or chill our mutual affection.

Now, the recognition that such knowledge of God as is described in this book is after all the chief thing in religion and that these other matters, though of real moment in their place, are only of secondary importance, must soften any feeling of hostility that we bear towards other denominations and increase and strengthen our feelings of respect and affection. For we know that this Knowledge of God lies at the heart of all sincere religious movements, whatever form they may assume, into whatever extravagances they may fall. We discern it in the Catholic's adoration of the Virgin Mother and in the rude prayer of the soldier in the Salvation Army. We know that it inspires the eloquence of the great preachers of the Church of England as well as the silent communion of the Quakers' Meeting. We are sure that it is the stirring of God in the soul, the voice of God speaking in the heart, the recognition of him in conscience, the experience of communion with the Holy Spirit, the strength inspired by prayer,—we are sure that

it is these things that are at the root of every sincere religious movement; and so we can forgive what may seem to us the superstition or the error, and we can rejoice that these brethren also feel the touch of God's love upon their souls and lift up their hearts in responsive praise. The Protestant thinks that the peace in his heart is given because his soul has been washed in the blood of Christ; the Catholic ascribes the like sweet sense of oneness with God to his consumption of the sacred wafer or to the efficacy of absolution. Neither the one nor the other dares to believe the simple, beautiful, solemn, enduring truth, that apart from atonement or eucharist, apart from blood or mass, whensoever a human spirit yearns towards the divine Spirit, that Spirit himself directly reveals himself to our Spirit, "beareth witness with our spirit," visits us as Spirit of Truth and Comforter, comes without observation, or mediation, or material conditions, and fills our being with the blessed companionship of his own almighty and eternal being. They dare not believe this; but we know that, under the form of creed or ritual, it is really the divine word in them that quickens their religious life; and so, while against every insincerity in religion

our indignation remains quick and strong, for every form of sincere piety we can only be grateful to God. We have no fears that by these paths men cannot be saved; for we know that they *are* saved so soon as they strive earnestly to live in harmony with the best and holiest that they know.

One other thing I would say. This knowledge of God, when it is clearly apprehended by the mind, makes us sure that neither any particular creed nor any particular sacrament is God's gateway to salvation. We are freed from the domination of presbyter or priest. We look neither, with some of our Protestant neighbours, to the merits of Christ to save us, nor, with our Catholic countrymen, to the mystery of the Eucharist to unlock for us the gates of Heaven. We know that our salvation depends on *what we are in ourselves*.

Yes, salvation is the state of harmony with all that God teaches us in his own appeal to our souls. But from this we are perpetually liable to fall away. We are continually tempted to disregard conscience. The world constantly woos us from the divine communion. We are in unceasing peril of becoming inconstant in the habit of prayer. God is there ready to help and save us always. But the way of

disobedience, of faithlessness, of self-will lies always ready to our feet. We have seen how easily the blessed Knowledge of God may be destroyed in us. We have, with God's help, to save ourselves by strenuous, faithful, steadfast, prayerful living. We accept this Knowledge of God as the sum and substance of religious faith; we put away from us much which most men hold sacred; there are no men in the world who need more than we earnestness in the moral strife, constancy in the life of prayer.

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